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VALDA HÂNEM



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## THE ROMANCE OF A TURKISH HARÎM

BY  
DAISY HUGH PRYCE

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## P R E F A C E

THIS romance of a Turkish *harim* is founded upon careful study and intimate personal knowledge of the Osmanlis and their ways ; but it is not, in any respect, a true story, and the descriptions in it are intended to apply to no one particular *harim* in Cairo.

To lay bare the history and betray the secrets of an actual Turkish household would be a base return for the kindness, confidence, and hospitality experienced by the writer in generous measure from Turkish friends, and nothing of this kind has been done.





## CHAPTER I

MARGARET GREY had just come down from the flat roof of the palace, where she had been watching the flaming splendours of the November sunset over the Nile. She had been in Cairo for some days ; but the rain-clouds, which, since the extension of irrigation-works and other improvements under the British occupation, have become a common phenomenon in the Nile valley, had, since her arrival, spread a canopy of gray sky over the shining city, and this was her first glimpse of the wonderful effects of colour in an Egyptian sunset.

It was dying out now, and Margaret had come indoors, because she had been warned how dangerous it was to expose herself to any risk of a chill at this hour ; but in the West, behind the palm-trees that fringed the further bank of the wide river, the sky was still glowing with bands of crimson and gold ; and from a jutting window of delicate lattice-work on the western façade of the palace there was a glimpse of the sunset over the river, with a white-domed mosque and a sharply

pointed minaret standing out against it, which made an exquisite picture.

Margaret pushed open the little square lattice which was on a level with her eyes, and when she saw the picture thus framed she uttered an exclamation of delight.

‘Oh, Valda Hânem<sup>1</sup>! How beautiful—how wonderful! Do look!’ she exclaimed, turning round as she heard a rustle of silk in the recess behind her.

The Pâsha’s beautiful young wife, who often found the society of her little boy’s English governess a relief from the chatter and laughter of the other ladies of the *harîm*, had followed her to this quiet place, and she smiled gently at the foreigner’s enthusiasm.

‘I won’t take your peep-hole,’ she said, speaking the French language in soft, liquid tones that sounded musically strange. ‘See, I will open another, and then we can both look. It will pass away only too soon, like all beautiful things.’

She unfastened another little square window in the lattice-work, and looked out to see what it was that made the English girl so eager, but the loveliness of the evening lights had a different effect upon her. She gazed at them long and steadfastly, until at last Margaret was startled by

<sup>1</sup> For convenience of pronunciation the Turkish names and words in the following pages have a circumflex accent placed over the syllable on which the accent should fall. Thus *Hânem* (lady) rhymes, roughly speaking, with Barnum, *Pâsha* with lasher, *Hamîda* with Ouida, and *Harîm* with redeem.

the sound of a long-drawn sob, and turning quickly, she saw that her companion was gazing at the hills with her beautiful eyes full of tears.

‘Dear Valda,’ she exclaimed in sudden distress, ‘what is the matter? Why do you cry?’

‘I do not know,’ said the girl,—she was still quite a girl—trying to smile through her tears. ‘I am sure I do not know what it is that I want, but I feel that there is something.’

‘What can you want? Have you not got everything that you can possibly desire, a husband who is devoted to you, a beautiful little boy, and an affectionate mother from whom you are not parted, a splendid palace to live in, horses and carriages and slaves, magnificent dresses and diamonds, and many friends—dear Valda Hânem, what can you want more?’

The English girl was not much older than her companion; but her youth was passing with nothing to show for it, and the prospect that stretched before her was not a hopeful one. She had no claim upon any one in the world, and everything that she possessed could have been bought for less than fifty pounds. The smile on her patient face as she spoke showed that she felt the contrast between them; but the greatest inequality of all was one that she did not mention. Margaret Grey had a sweet face, and she had still that bloom of youth which lends a charm to the plainest features; but only in the light of loving eyes could she ever have looked beautiful. Her gray eyes were as true as steel; she always looked as fresh and trim as if she had just come from her

dressing-room ; but her features were small, and her expression was intellectual rather than pretty ; there was no symmetry of form or brilliancy of colour about her, and by the side of Valda's glowing beauty she looked plain and insipid.

As the two girls stood together now, it was little wonder that Margaret should feel some sense of the contrast that they must present. Valda was going that evening to a Turkish wedding, and she had put on before dinner the gorgeous gown that the festivity demanded. Her dress was of deep rose-coloured velvet, simply made in European fashion with a plain skirt and a long, flowing train ; but the closely fitting bodice was almost covered with diamonds, and it had a fairy-godmother effect which was not at all European. Such diamonds as these Margaret had never seen before. The single large stones that Valda wore as ear-rings were like great dewdrops flashing fires of prismatic colours ; the splendid necklace round her white throat represented a whole year's income of one of the richest Pâshas in the Ottoman Empire ; the aigrette that glittered in her hair was the memorial of a victory won by a soldier-ancestor in far-off times ; the massive clasp, in the design of the Turkish arms, which confined the lace at her bosom was another family heirloom, the gift of a grateful Sultan. Not a duchess, not an empress, in the whole of Europe could display more magnificent jewels than these ; yet dazzling as they were, they were eclipsed by the beauty that they adorned.

As she looked at the slender girlish figure standing in her magnificent dress beside the open lattice-window that was filled with the rosy reflections of the sunset, Margaret was struck afresh with the marvellous beauty of the pale oval face with the great dark eyes and perfect features, and the golden hair which was such a veritable crown. Valda's waving hair was an inheritance from a Circassian great-grandmother, and its soft and silky masses were of the wonderful deep golden tint that goes with the creamy complexion and dark brown eyes of a Circassian beauty. Hers was a loveliness of no ordinary type ; yet she stood there in her velvet and her diamonds, as simple and unconscious as when she walked about the *harim* in her yellow slippers and morning wrapper of blue cotton ; and the tears flowed down her cheeks.

Margaret had been sadly disillusioned by her experiences as a governess in England before she had found a refuge in the haven of a Turkish *harim*, and simplicity such as this was something new to her ; she was strangely touched by it, and she felt for the beautiful weeping girl the sudden tenderness of a warm affection.

'God has given you many good gifts, Valda,' she said gently, 'and you ought to be happy. How many European ladies there are who would envy you !'

Valda had listened unmoved to the enumeration of her advantages ; but the wistful smile which accompanied Margaret's last words went straight to her heart, and in the silence which followed,

Margaret found her hand caught and imprisoned in a warm clasp of ardent sympathy.

‘Ah, Mademoiselle, dear, good, patient Mademoiselle!’ she exclaimed remorsefully. ‘It is true, it is all quite true; and to you, you to whom the good God has not chosen to give any of these things, I must seem a wicked, ungrateful creature. Perhaps I am, perhaps I am a monster, I feel it sometimes; and yet, yet there is something in me that longs, and sometimes I cannot keep it in. When I look at the moonlight or the sunset, or anything very beautiful, I feel it, that strange longing feeling. You remember at Constantinople, —you were with us there all the summer—how I used to mount to the top of that high mound in the middle of our garden, and look at the sunset over the Bosphorus and the light in the sky behind the domes and minarets of the mosques? It always made me cry, and sometimes, when I am with you, I feel as if you could understand. Mademoiselle, you have told me of all these good things that I possess; but I would give them all, *all* in exchange for the free life that any common little shepherdess leads upon the hills. I declare to you, and I mean what I say, that I should be happier so. If I could, I would pass my life alone, —alone and free upon the hills, with no one, no one at all except my little Djemâl-ed-Din.’

‘And your husband?’

‘Oh, my husband,—he might come if he liked, —I don’t wish for any scandal. I should not mind him,’ said Valda indifferently.

‘He is so devoted to you, he is so kind and good, such a gallant soldier and true gentleman ! Surely you must appreciate him ?’

‘He is so short,’ said Valda with a sigh.

‘Valda !’

‘Don’t be shocked at me, dear Mademoiselle,’ she said smiling, but looking a little ashamed of herself nevertheless, ‘but it was the first thing that struck me when I saw him. You know I had never seen him before we were married, nor he me, of course. I might have seen him ; there was nothing to prevent me from looking through a window, or from a carriage when I was veiled, though he might not see me ; but he was in Berlin when his mother proposed the match, and he only came home just in time for it. I had had no opportunity of seeing him ; besides, I knew that whatever he might be like, my opinion would make no difference. I was only fifteen, and I had scarcely given up playing with my dolls. I had been told he was handsome, and I was chiefly interested in my wedding-dress ; that was beautiful, —ah yes, that was really beautiful !’

Valda paused, a smile of pensive pleasure lighting up her lovely face as she recalled a memory that was thoroughly satisfactory.

‘What was it like ?’ inquired Margaret.

‘It was a pale pink brocade of the very richest silk,’ she answered, ‘and it was covered all over with pearls in front. I knew that I had pretty hair, though my mother told me I was ugly, to prevent me from being vain ; but when I tried on the dress, and looked at myself in the glass the day

before the wedding, I was astonished. You must not suppose that I am vain, dear Mademoiselle. I know very well that I am nothing to look at now; but that dress did really suit me most wonderfully, and I was quite pleased with myself. Then it occurred to me to think what the Bey (he was not a Pâsha then) would think of me, and from that moment my pleasure and satisfaction in the wedding was gone. My heart began to quail, and when the day came it quailed more. It was a dreadful day,—oh dear, it was a dreadful day! The papers had all been signed and the house was full of guests; the marriage was really completed, and I had never seen him. Then the moment came. I sat trembling on the bridal-throne, with an empty chair placed ready by my side for him, and he came quickly up the room, led by my father between the lines of guests. He came up the steps of the throne, and clasped a diamond bracelet on my arm, then he lifted my veil and looked at me. I was nearly fainting, but I gave one look, and I remember that was what I thought,—ah, he is short!’

‘It was a strange experience to have to go through,’ said Margaret meditatively.

‘It was miserable, miserable, my dear! And then afterwards, when the ceremonies were all over, when we had thrown our gold *piastres*, and they had all been picked up—when he gave me his arm to lead me through all the lines of guests, and took me to his own private suite of rooms, and closed the door, and I found myself alone with him, this dreadful, strange, short man whom I



knew nothing at all about,—that was the most terrible moment of all ! ’

‘ What did you do ? ’ asked Margaret.

‘ Do ? I did nothing ; there was nothing to be done. I just fainted quietly. I felt him catching me in his arms as I was falling, and then I knew nothing more until I found myself lying on the divan, and saw him bending over me asking passionately if I disliked him. Why was I so much afraid of him ? What had he done to frighten me ? Then I fainted again, and in the end he had to call in my mother and old Anâna. They scolded me well ; but he never did, though it must have been rather mortifying for him. He was not young like me, but he told me afterwards that he had never been in such a state of mind in all his life.’

‘ The poor Pâsha ! And don’t you care for him ? ’

‘ Oh yes ! Of course I do. He is my husband, you see, and he is the only man I know except my father and my brother. With us, you see, there is no choice and no responsibility. One accepts one’s husband just as one does one’s father or grandfather, or any other relation.’

Margaret could not repress a smile. ‘ It saves trouble in some ways, no doubt,’ she said.

‘ It is the decree of destiny, and there is an end,’ said Valda resignedly. ‘ And if a husband and wife do not agree, they need not see much of each other. In any case there is not so much opportunity for clashing as with you. We never go out together, and we move in perfectly different circles, he among the men, and I among the

women ; it must be much easier for us. And then we marry so young ; I was only fifteen when I was married. Now I am twenty, and I am as much accustomed to him as I am to my brother. I think I like him almost as much.'

'He deserves more than that from you, Valda. He loves you with all the strength of his nature, and he would worship the very ground upon which you stand if you would let him. You ought to be very thankful to be able to feel as certain as you do that he will never bring home a second wife to disturb your peace.'

'He had better not !' Valda exclaimed quickly ; 'that is, unless he wishes to part with me. I should demand my papers of divorce in a moment if I found that he was thinking of another woman, and he knows that quite well !'

Margaret was for a moment a little taken aback. She knew what the Turkish laws of divorce were, but it was always a shock to her to be reminded of them, and she preferred not to touch upon the subject. She went on discreetly with her praises of the Pâsha. 'He does not dream of anything of the sort, of course ; he does not think of any woman in the world but you. Consider how he gives up every engagement to be with you, how he comes home early from every ball, every dinner, so as not to lose the evening with you. And when you were ill, for three days (don't you remember ?) he sat with you without ever undressing—without ever moving from your bedside except to give you your medicine. He insisted on doing all the nursing himself.'

‘Well, why shouldn’t he?’ demanded Valda. ‘I should have done the same for him if he had been ill, you know I should.’

‘Ah yes,—but a man,—men are so different. And it wasn’t only when he was so anxious about you. When you were getting well, don’t you remember that he still stayed with you all day, reading the paper, writing letters for you, telling you stories, and doing everything that he could possibly think of to cheer you and amuse you? Ah, Valda, I can assure you there are not many English husbands who would show such devotion.’

‘Are there not?’ said Valda in surprise. ‘Allah, Allah! I am sorry to hear that! They look so delightful. I like the English gentlemen best of all; there is something about them,—I don’t know what it is—something so fascinating. They are so very polite, so full of deference. I have often observed them, sitting on the back seat of the carriage, bending to speak to the ladies in the place of honour. I never think that the English ladies are quite worthy of them, though I much prefer them to the French ladies. But the English gentlemen—ah, *mon Dieu!* the tall fair ones with the little blonde moustaches so well trained, and brave blue eyes,—how handsome and gallant they are! Ah, if destiny had given me to an Englishman! One of the distinguished ones I mean, of course, not any of those wild fellows that come every year with Cook, with their hats on the backs of their heads, and their faces all hot and red, and the long white rags of muslin on their hats flapping

in the wind as they gallop in the sun like madmen on their donkeys. I don't like *that* sort !'

Margaret began to laugh in spite of herself. 'Dear Valda Hânem, you should not talk like this; it is most foolish and unprofitable. But tell me, where have you seen all these English people?'

'Oh, here at Cairo; there are crowds of them here, and I see them every day when I drive out to Ghiseh or Ghesireh. You will enjoy yourself now that you have come to Cairo, for there are so many of your compatriots here, and you will go out and make friends with them, of course.'

'I don't know,' said Margaret rather sadly. 'There are kind people here, no doubt, and I have introductions to some of them, but I don't know that I shall care to go out much. The society here is very gay, and I can never have any part or lot in it. I think I should be happier dreaming my life quietly away here, and forgetting all about the turmoil that goes on in the great city outside.'

The lonely English girl looked wistfully out into the stillness and silence of the palace gardens. The swiftly falling Southern twilight was deepening into dusk among the shrubs and flowers, the marble fountains and mosaic walks; but the evening air came up laden with the scent of roses and jessamine and frangipani; and looking down past a clump of huge-leaved india-rubber trees, whose long pink buds were unfolding as if in promise of monster flowers, Margaret could see great hedges of white jasmine, and crimson hibiscus, and splendid purple masses of bougainvillea shining out of the shadow. Two stately lions of solid stone stood, as if on

guard, on either side of the Turkish insignia carved in marble which crowned the archway of the palace gates, and beyond was the lovely landscape, a silvery crescent moon beginning to shine out above the graceful fans of a single straight-stemmed palm-tree in the distance.

‘We are safe and contented and happy in this quiet palace and these peaceful gardens,’ said Margaret; ‘but the life outside,—who can tell what it might contain?’

‘Oh, my dear, you do not know what it is yet; when you do, you will not talk like this. You will like Cairo, I know you will; everybody does, and you will not be an exception. Even I am pleased when we leave Constantinople to come here, though of course it does not make much difference to me,—nothing makes much difference in our lives!’

She ended with a little sigh, and closed the windows; and as she moved away, Margaret saw that her beautiful eyes were again full of melancholy.

## CHAPTER II

MARGARET sat in the garden of the *harim*, on a gay-coloured mattress in the shade of the mandalines, an unmistakably English figure in neat, navy-blue coat and skirt, and irreproachable collar and cuffs. It was close upon Christmas-time, and the orange and lemon and mandarine trees on every side of her had thousands of golden balls glistening among their dark green leaves. In and out of the closely packed shrubberies, a mosaic walk, set with white and blue and yellow pebbles, and bordered with a narrow ribbon of white marble, wound in a graceful floral pattern ; and a few steps away, where a geometrical design like a rose-window formed the junction of several paths, a dark-eyed Circassian slave, in flowing white draperies that were loosely girded to her statuesque figure, was gathering the ripest of the fruit. Djemâl-ed-Din Bey, the little four-year-old son of the Pâsha, a charming little figure in a shabby brown frock, stood near the slave, and he was superintending with imperious insatiability the work of selection.

‘*Choc, choc* (many, many),’ he said urgently ; ‘I want many.’

It was in order that this child might learn

English that the Pâsha had engaged Margaret Grey ; but the little fellow was still very young, and he depended so much upon his slave-nurse, that the duties of a governess were very much of a sinecure. All that Margaret could do was to tell him little stories in English, whenever she could get him to listen, and to sit by while he played in the garden, and do what she could to prevent the slaves from spoiling him. Ayôosha, his nurse, was a most affectionate and well-meaning creature, but her notion of managing the child was to indulge him until he became utterly intolerable, and then to turn upon him in angry irritation. It was not a satisfactory method. The little fellow had a violent, self-willed temper, and under this system he was getting so tyrannical that he was becoming a terror and a nuisance to the whole *harim*.

This morning the occupation of eating the first oranges of the season had kept Djemâl-ed-Din quiet, and he had been wonderfully good. Margaret sat on the cushions spread out in the shade, and idly studied the intricacies of the patterns on the path, while her thoughts were busy with the subject of her conversation with Valda the night before. What a strange girl she was, with her wonderful beauty of which she was so completely unconscious, and her quick, receptive intelligence, her gentle manners, and her quiet melancholy. She knew nothing about Ibsen or the Zeitgeist, and for her the New Woman was not ; yet from her tone and manner it almost seemed as if some subtle breath of the spirit of the age had crept into the well-guarded *harim*, and infected her mind. How else

did it come that she felt this vague misery of discontent, this strange yearning for some intangible good that she could not define?

‘It is not knowledge that she pines for, Margaret reflected; ‘she knows a great deal more than I do about the main interests of life. She has been married for five years to the Pâsha, who is a clever and enlightened man, and he tells her the things that are in his mind as well as what is in his heart. It is clear that he considers her his equal, morally and intellectually, and he consults her, and is willing to be influenced by her counsels. She knows all that, and she is fond of him in her way; she knows no other man, and has no desire to do so. Why is it that she is not happy?’

Margaret was still pondering over this problem when she was startled by a sudden commotion which arose at the far end of the walk. Ayôosha, the Circassian nurse, was gesticulating and chattering like an angry monkey, and the little Bey was standing with his fat legs wide apart, and his brow puckered into a most unchild-like frown, repeating over and over again: ‘*Yûsuf Effendi! Bâna ver Yûsuf Effendi, ver bâna!* (My lord Joseph! ‘Give me my lord Joseph, give me!’)

Margaret jumped up, and went hastily along the walk between the orange-trees. ‘What is the matter?’ she asked judicially. ‘Who is Yûsuf Effendi?’

Ayôosha burst into a flood of explanation in Turkish, and by the aid of a few tortured French words she at last made the governess understand that ‘my lord Joseph’ had nothing to do with the



matter, and that Yûsuf Effendi was only a name for mandaline oranges. It appeared that Djemâl-ed-Din, having ascertained by personal experience that the oranges were no longer sour, as his nurse had assured him, had lost confidence in her judgment, and was not to be restrained from excess.

‘How many has he already had?’ inquired Margaret with some anxiety.

‘*Dôkus* (nine), Marmozelle,’ replied the nurse, holding up her slender hands with one thumb depressed to indicate the number nine. ‘*Êhvet, êhvet!* (yes, yes),’ nodding her head affirmatively, ‘*dôkus!*’

‘Nine oranges in one morning!’ exclaimed Margaret in dismay. ‘Oh, Ayôosha, what were you thinking of? He will certainly be ill!’

The little Bey stood by, with his great brown eyes fixed under their frowning brows upon the arbitrator, and his golden curls shining in the sun. His first act when in a passion was always to tear off his cap and toss it into the dirtiest place he could see, and it lay now in a muddy pool under the orange-trees where the gardeners had been watering. Ayôosha perceived that he was making ready to roar, and knowing the consequences, she hastily slipped another orange out of its loose-fitting peel, and stuffed it into his hands.

‘Take it, and don’t cry, you naughty, bad child!’ she said with intense irritation; but it was too late. Already Djemâl-ed-Din had begun to yell, and the quiet place resounded with screams of ‘*kûchuk Ana* (little mother)’ until it might have been supposed that he was in mortal agony. In

two minutes a slight figure in blue came out of the glass doors that led to the reception rooms of the *harim*, and, running down the flight of marble steps into the garden, Valda came hurrying to the rescue. This was always the end of every dispute with Djemâl-ed-Din, and as she invariably took his part and scolded the slaves, he knew that he had only to yell in order to get his own way, and became every day more and more unmanageable. Margaret had found remonstrance and complaint alike useless, and she could only stand by, looking on with silent disapprobation, while Valda caught up the screaming child in her arms, and turned with flashing eyes upon the unfortunate Ayôosha.

‘The child had already eaten more oranges than were good for him,’ Margaret said at last, feeling obliged to try to stem the torrent of reproach and blame. ‘Ayôosha was only trying to prevent him from making himself ill.’

‘But what folly to let him stay where the oranges are,’ said Valda indignantly. ‘I don’t blame you, Mademoiselle. It is this foolish idiot of a woman who ought to have known that when once he began to want the oranges, there was nothing to be done but to take him out of sight of them. He never cries like that with me, because he knows that if it is possible for him to have a thing I shall never deny it to him. But these slaves have no tact, and no idea of managing him. No, Effên’, you cannot have any more oranges, but *kúchuk Ana* will get you something nice to look at, something very nice indeed, Djemâl-ed-Din!’

The little boy had stopped crying, and now

looked up at his beautiful mother with a smile of anticipation shining through his tears. He threw away the orange that he held in his hand, and Valda looked at Margaret in triumph. 'You see how good he is with me,' her glance seemed to say; 'I have no difficulty in managing him.'

Margaret kept silence, but it was the silence of disapproval, and the steady gaze of her clear gray eyes impressed Valda as it had done from the beginning. It would have been easy, of course, for her to have gained favour by assenting and siding with the mistress against the slave, and any one of the ladies of the *harim* would have done it; but Margaret's ways were not like theirs, and in her heart Valda recognised and respected the difference.

'I have not shown you my diamonds yet,' she said hastily. 'You said you would like to look at those I had on last night, but those are not all. We have got all our things unpacked now, my mother and I, and it will amuse Djemâl-ed-Din to see the jewels. I will bring them out here.'

She went back to the house to fetch them, and presently returned, bearing in her hands a large rickety-looking box of white cardboard, with the cover gone and one side broken down.

'You haven't got your diamonds in *there*, Hânem!' Margaret exclaimed with a smile of irrepressible amusement.

'Yes, my dear; I have them here for the present, until I have time to arrange them in my cabinet. But you know I never have time; I hadn't all the weeks that we stayed in Scanderiâ.'

'But at least you keep them under lock and key?'

‘Well, no ; I am afraid that I am rather careless. My mother sometimes scolds me. These have been on the divan in her room for the last two days, just like this.’

Valda smiled as she sank into a cross-legged position on the cushions, and pointed to the treasures that she had in her lap in their mean case. The jewels were wrapped up, each in its separate little bit of ragged muslin or crumpled tissue-paper, and little Djemâl-ed-Din came up to stand at his mother’s knee, and fixed a charmed gaze upon them as they were unwound.

‘Surely it is rather rash with all these slaves about ?’ said Margaret. ‘Do you think it is quite right to put such temptation in their way ? Your jewels are enough to corrupt the morals of an archbishop——’

‘An archbishop ? I don’t know about an archbishop, but the *khâlfâ* (slaves) one may trust. You see, they are in the family ; they are not like servants. They remain with us ; their wants are all amply supplied ; they have no life outside the palace, and even if they could get out to dispose of anything that they stole, which would be difficult, what would be the good of the money to them ? They want for nothing.’ It was true, and Margaret assented. The position of the slaves was so different from what her imagination had led her to expect, that she had suffered a complete reaction of ideas about them. ‘They have each of them a new dress every month, and as much underclothing as they care to make up. All their clothes are provided in abundance, and

they have a liberal allowance of pocket-money ; fifty *piastres* a month some of them get, and they cannot spend it. Why should they want to steal ?'

'It would be very ungrateful certainly,' said Margaret ; 'and I admit that there ought to be no temptation. Still human nature is weak, and these jewels are so splendid,—oh, they *are* beautiful !'

They were all out of their wrappings by this time, and they lay spread about in the sunshine,—tiaras, necklaces, aigrettes, and brooches in strange barbaric devices, all set with the glittering stones which flashed like coloured flames. They were all diamonds, and about their value there was no room for doubt. It was a princely fortune that was represented there, and Margaret marvelled as she looked ; but she knew that in a dominion like that of the Ottoman Empire, where a man's fortune might at any moment be seized upon and confiscated at the mere whim or caprice of a tyrant greedy of gain, jewels were a very natural and not unwise form of investment. The Turks buy up the finest diamonds in the European market ; and a rich Pâsha will very often have the greater part of his savings stored up in the ornaments with which he loads his wife. If he should wish to realise, a little outlay in Palais Royal rubbish would speedily console her and deceive the outside world, and indeed the mixture of false with true is often so cleverly contrived that it is not easy even for intimates to determine the state of their friends' finances.

There was no Palais Royal trash in this glittering collection, however. Margaret, inexperienced as she was, could see that at a glance, and for the moment she was fairly dazzled by the show.

The blue Egyptian sky overhead, the brilliant green of the garden, and the palace walls of dazzling white which enclosed it, made up a scene not soon to be forgotten. The gardeners had been at their work of flooding with hose and syringe all the beds, and every leaf and flower was still glistening with shining drops of water. This central court of the palace was sacred to the inmates of the *harim*, and out of the rows of square windows which looked into it were to be seen the little bits of lace and muslin which the ladies washed for themselves and hung out to dry. The sunny air was perfectly still; but outside the high barrier of the walls the picturesque tide of Egyptian life, quickened into intenser activity by the influx of English energy, rolled on unceasingly, and the busy hum and stir of it sounded in the distance like the murmur of the wind in the trees or the wash of the waves on a distant beach. Margaret thought of the crowds hurrying along those busy streets, — pleasure-seekers, money-makers, and beggars of every nation and every clime—how little they guessed what was the scene shut in by the palace walls. Valda, sitting with her lap heaped up with diamonds, and the sunshine flickering through the leaves on to the wealth of her golden hair, was the centre of it, and it occurred to Margaret that the Pâsha did well to guard his treasures so jealously. He trusted her

unreservedly, but she was very young to have the entire charge of jewels that were of so much value, and she was evidently inclined to be careless about them.

The little Djemâl-ed-Din, who was recovering from the satisfaction which the mere sight of so many pretty things had at first afforded him, was now beginning to clamour for some to wear, and his mother was ready to humour him in this as in all other things. With a soothing '*Pêkeh, Effên*' (very well, my lord), she fastened a splendid star, which was one of the most beautiful of them all, upon the breast of his shabby little brown pelisse.

'*Kúchuk Ana*, I want much, *choc, choc!*' said the little spoiled rogue.

'*Pêkeh Effên, pêkeh Effên!*' replied Valda, and, with pins that she borrowed from the slave, she dressed him up with clasps and stars, until the adornments of a Prussian cavalry officer would have sunk into insignificance by the side of him. Then Djemâl-ed-Din, delighted with himself, called for his military cap and his sword, and strutted in slow and solemn state round the fountain, announcing that he was now a '*biûgue Pâsha* (great Pâsha),' and that he was going to conquer everybody.

Ayôosha followed him as in duty bound; but on her handsome face there was a look of deep displeasure, and her black eyebrows were drawn together until they almost met. The interest which she had taken in the exhibition of the diamonds had for a moment dissipated the anger

burning in her dark eyes; she had hung over them absorbed, but when they were given to Djemâl-ed-Din to wear, she had vehemently objected, and the cloud which returned to her face as her remonstrances were disregarded, hung heavier than ever upon her brow.

Valda Hânem looked after her as she marched sullenly after the exulting child, and an expression of vexation and resentment crossed her face. 'Do you see how tiresome she is? She crosses the Bey in every particular, and she is annoyed if every one else does not do the same. Really it is too much; I cannot stand it any longer. I will have her married to one of my husband's bailiffs in Armenia, and then I shall be rid of her.'

'Oh, Hânem, we should miss her very much,' said Margaret in dismay. 'She is very faithful and devoted, and she does everything for the child; you do not really mean it?'

'Yes, I do. I have been thinking of it for a long time, and Sacêda is now old enough to take her place. I know that there is a man whom my husband wishes to attach to himself, and I shall tell him that he may give him this girl as soon as he likes. We shall certainly not have had out of her the worth of the money that the Pâsha my father paid for her: it was seventy pounds in English sovereigns; but she has been with us for ten years of service now, and that is as long as one expects to keep a slave before marrying her off.'

'Poor Ayôosha!' said Margaret regretfully. 'She is so devoted to the little Bey that I am afraid it will almost break her heart to part with him.'



‘A husband will console her,’ said Valda. ‘She will be glad enough to get married and to have a home of her own; and the Pâsha will provide her well with clothes and furniture. She deserves that, for I do believe she is really fond of the Bey. It is her one good point, but her temper is really too tiresome. Why should she be so sulky and disagreeable?’

‘She is vexed that Djemâl-ed-Din should wear the diamonds, because she feels it such a responsibility to have to look after them,’ said Margaret. ‘When he gets hold of anything that he likes, he will sometimes stick to it for days, and insist upon having it under his pillow at night, so that there is no chance of getting it from him; and with objects of so much value as these, you know, Hânem, I think it is a risk. I do not think it is wise not to keep them under lock and key.’

‘Oh, everybody in the *harîm* is quite honest,’ said Valda carelessly. ‘Besides, Allah is great, and what Allah pleases will happen. Allah gave me my diamonds, and without His will they cannot be taken away from me.’

Fatalism carried to such a point as this rather took away Margaret’s breath, and before she could say anything, Valda had gathered up her diamonds, upon which Djemâl-ed-Din’s raid seemed to have made little impression, and swept them back into the cardboard box. Then she gave a hasty exclamation, and snatching up a long strip of clear muslin that lay near her she covered her head and turned her face away.

‘Here is Ivâss with Djemâl-ed-Din’s dinner,’

she said, as a stout, swarthy Turk in full petticoat-breeches of dark blue cotton came into sight, bearing a tray on his head. 'Ours is ready too, no doubt, and I had better make my escape to the other side before Djêmal sees me. Will you take him in with Ayôosha, Mademoiselle, and follow me as soon as you can ?'

### CHAPTER III

It was a little late when Margaret came in for the mid-day meal, and the ladies, having already performed their customary ablutions, were seated at table devoting themselves to their soup in very business-like fashion. Two smiling, dark-eyed Circassian girls were still in attendance, however, with a basin and ewer of massive silver, and Margaret, who had won golden opinions by the respect which she paid to national prejudices in small matters, held out her hands for water to be poured over them, and wiped them on a gold-embroidered, scented towel that was handed to her before she slipped into her place at the end of the long table.

A large party of ladies had come together for luncheon; but some were morning callers, and some were friends on a visit, and among them all there were only three whom the master of the house could ever see unveiled,—his beautiful young wife, her mother (a portly, and still handsome woman of fifty), and a very old woman (the mother's mother) who sat at the head of the table. The rest were all friends or relations of the family, who out of necessity or convenience

availed themselves of the liberality of Turkish ideas of hospitality to make the house their home, but who would fly, screaming and hiding their faces in their veils, if the master of it chanced to come across them on his way through the *harîm* to his wife's rooms. He was therefore excluded from the luncheon and dinner, which were the only regular meals of the day, and he dined with the other gentlemen in the *selâmlek*.

The *selâmlek* was the part of the palace which was appropriated by the men, and the doors which led out of it into the *harîm* were always kept locked. The Pâsha had the keys, and the chief eunuch had one duplicate which would admit him into the living-rooms of the *selâmlek*; but no one else ever passed that way. His Excellency the Pâsha had to go through every day for his meals, and sometimes, as he went past the dining-room which opened out of the great central hall, he would look in to speak to his wife. Margaret heard his step approaching as she took her place, and there was a sudden commotion among the ladies as there came a tap at the door, and his voice was heard outside, uttering the magic word *dêstur*. The literal meaning of the word is 'custom,' but it is used in the precincts of the *harîm* as a warning cry to give notice of the approach of a masculine presence, and when strange ladies were near, even the Pâsha was obliged to announce himself in this way. With little shrieks and cries of pleasurable alarm and excitement, the ladies hastened to wrap up their heads in the first rag that they could lay their

hands upon,—antimacassars, napkins, anything that came handy—and one very particular old dame of seventy, not finding anything that she deemed a sufficient shield, jumped up and made a rush to hide herself behind the window-curtain.

Then His Excellency opened the door, and holding it slightly ajar, so that he could just see his wife, he addressed a few rapid words in Turkish to her. He spoke too quickly for Margaret to be able to understand, but Valda's replies were simple, and she used the stereotyped forms that are for ever upon Turkish lips. '*Pêkeh Effên,* *Êhvet Effên,* *Pêkeh Effên*.' *Pêkeh* means very well, and *êhvet* means yes; and with these two words in combination with *Effên*, which is an abbreviation both for *Effendi* (my lord) and *Effenden* (my lady), Margaret had found it possible to go a long way in Turkish conversation.

The Pâsha, like most Turks of his class, was punctiliously polite and well-bred in his manner towards the ladies of his household, and Margaret noticed that his glance was steadfastly fixed upon his wife, and that he never permitted it to wander towards any of the ladies who were unknown to him. Hamîda Hânem, the wife of a rich Pâsha in Cairo, who sat in the place of honour next to Valda, was a frequent visitor at the *harim*, and it seemed to Margaret that she rather enjoyed the opportunity of coquetting with her veil before the strange Pâsha. The law only requires that the Turkish women should have their hair covered up from the sight of men, and the delicacy of feeling that has impelled them to make a custom of hiding their faces as

well did not seem to be strongly developed in Hamîda Hânem. She evinced great interest in the conversation, and, turning her head to listen, allowed her muslin scarf to fall away from her face as if unconsciously, then suddenly remembering, she dragged it hastily forward so as to shield her profile from view. She repeated this manœuvre several times, and it was an amusing little comedy to watch ; but it was lost upon the Pâsha, and his blue eyes only melted into a smile of amusement as he permitted himself to glance for an instant at Margaret, and saw in her face some reflection of the humour of the situation. He had come to tell Valda of an engagement he had just remembered that would take him out for the whole afternoon, and he wanted to know if she would be driving out, and which carriage she would like him to leave for her. When this was settled, he withdrew, closing the door carefully after him, and the slaves continued their interrupted occupation of handing round the dishes.

It was a sumptuous meal that was served, and on grand occasions the table would be covered with the heads of flowers packed together in tasteful geometrical designs, and there would be as many as fifteen courses. To-day there were only ten ; but they were very good ones, and Hamîda Hânem congratulated herself upon having prolonged her call so opportunely. Lentil-soup, mutton-cutlets with green peas, broiled mutton in dice-like pieces on iron skewers, roast turkey with chestnuts, puffs of rich pastry with sweetened vegetable-marrow inside, a mutton stew with aubergines, stuffed toma-

toes and asparagus, balls of puff-pastry floating in a clear white syrup of boiled sugar, and a semi-opaque jelly made of mandarine oranges,—this was the bill-of-fare, and last of all came *pilau*, the dish of rice which is the never-failing finish of a Turkish feast. The rice is boiled first, then mixed with butter, coloured pink, and baked in a large bowl of common brown earthenware, in which it is brought, smoking hot, to table ; and a most appetising and satisfying dish it is,—the most effectual of all for inducing that plumpness of countenance and rotundity of figure which is considered so beautiful and desirable by Turkish ladies.

Unfortunately for Margaret her powers of appreciation were almost always exhausted long before the rice arrived upon the scene, and she found herself regarded with compassion as a poor little shrimp of a woman who could not eat, and who could therefore never hope to get fat. Valda tried in vain to persuade her to share with her some porter that an English lady had recommended.

‘It is villanous stuff, certainly,’ Valda said. ‘It is black and hideous, and has a worse taste than any medicine ; but that is no doubt why it is so efficacious. Madame Neville told me that there is nothing like it for giving one a fine figure, and I am resolved to give it a fair trial.’

Valda therefore drank porter, and most of the other ladies had a little bottle of some special beverage recommended for their health placed beside them ; but when they drank it they never forgot to screw up their faces and say ‘Ugh!’ so as to vindicate themselves as good Moslems, and

to remind themselves and everybody else that it was only as medicine that they were taking it, and that they found the taste exceedingly nasty. Margaret was often the only person at table who abstained from doing violence to her feelings, and drank plain water.

On the present occasion she refused, as usual, about half the dishes that were brought to her, and she had leisure to observe Hamîda Hânem, who was a subject truly worth studying. This lady, who seemed to be a more intimate friend than any other visitor at the *harîm*, was in no danger of suffering from the wasting which was regarded as such a misfortune. She was an exceedingly stout woman of thirty, with a face which might ten years ago have had the attractiveness of a certain *beauté de diable*. She had big eyes of a blue-gray steely tint under straight dark eyebrows, and her small, turned-up nose was not without a certain provocative charm of its own ; but her face had grown puffy, her complexion had coarsened, and her hair, which looked as if it had not been combed for a week, was dyed yellow,—a terrible, dull tow-colour that did not suit her skin, and gave to her whole appearance an artificial effect that could not fail to strike an unaccustomed beholder with something of a shock. She was dressed in a gorgeous Parisian tea-gown, carefully arranged so as to accentuate the exuberant proportions of her figure ; and like so many owners of fine eyes, she was plainly quite convinced of her pretensions to rank as a beauty. Her manners at table were peculiar. She shovelled the food greedily into her mouth, pinching the



meat off the bones with her fingers, and talking and laughing loudly with her mouth full, while her eyes travelled restlessly and observantly round the table. Several of the other ladies liked to disregard the knives and forks laid for them, and use their fingers instead ; but they did it very delicately and deftly, wiping the rosy tips of their fingers continually on snow-white bits of wet muslin, and the action was not without a certain dainty grace. Valda, whose ambitions were all European, had taken careful observations of Margaret's manner of manipulating her knife and fork, and imitating that, and all the other little points of her behaviour at table, she had learned how to do everything with perfect refinement and propriety. The contrast between her and her guest was striking, and glancing from one to the other, Margaret could not help wondering what could possibly have been the attraction that had induced the friendship between them.

‘What do you think of Hamîda Hânem, Mademoiselle?’ asked Valda, detaining Margaret as she followed her out into the hall when luncheon was over.

Hamîda had gone out first. She had got through the courses before any one else, and the moment she had done, she called to a slave to pour water over her hands into the silver basin, and waddled out of the room. She was now reposing on a divân in the boudoir of the Hânem Effendi ; but Valda seemed in no hurry to join her. She was more inclined for a little conversation with Margaret, and she lingered with her in the hall until the Circassians appeared with the coffee.

‘Stay and drink your coffee with me, Made-moiselle,’ she said, taking a tiny cup of the thick brown mixture from a round tray with gorgeously embroidered hangings that a slave was handing round. The cups were of the most delicate egg-shell china, without handles, and they were poised like eggs in wineglass-shaped holders of jewelled filagree-work. Margaret made a remark about their beauty and quaintness as she took hers.

‘Ah, never mind the cups,’ said Valda laughing; ‘it is not of them that you are thinking, I know, and I shall not allow you to make them an excuse for not answering my question. I saw your face when you were watching Hamîda Hânem at luncheon, and I had great difficulty in keeping my countenance. It is true that her manners are terrible.’

Margaret said nothing, but she made a slight grimace that was expressive enough, and Valda burst into a little ripple of gentle laughter.

‘She shocked you, I saw; but you know she is considered a fine woman, and she has kept her figure wonderfully. It is a pity she is so self-indulgent that she will not wear stays. She gets the best sort from Paris, but she won’t keep them on for more than half an hour at a time, so what is the good of them?’

‘She comes here very often,’ remarked Margaret, ‘and you visit her a good deal, don’t you? Do you find pleasure in her society?’

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ said Valda wearily; ‘one must fill up the time somehow, you see, and she is not worse than the others. She is more amusing

than most of them, for she knows a great deal ; she knows good and evil.'

'It is better not to know evil,' said Margaret with the quietness born of entire conviction ; 'it is happier not to know it.'

'Is it ? Well, perhaps, but undiluted good is not amusing, and we lead such shut-up lives. When one's life is dull one needs some occupation for one's fancy, and forbidden fruit is sweet. I don't want to taste it, of course, but it is amusing to know and hear about things. And Hamîda Hânem is a clever woman in her way. She understands how to manage her husband, and she has more freedom than most of the Egyptian ladies even, who are far less strict than we are at Constantinople. Her husband, Mûrad Âli Pâsha, is a fool, and she profits by it. She is very emancipated indeed.'

'But you would not wish to enjoy that sort of freedom ?'

'Ah, no ; at the price of having such a fool as Mûrad Âli for a husband, certainly not ! And I do not approve of Hamîda's ways,—don't imagine that I should ever wish to imitate her. Her stories amuse me for a time, but they only make me feel more miserable and discontented afterwards, and I don't really care for her society. I much prefer to be with you, dear Mademoiselle.' Margaret set down her empty coffee-cup with an incredulous smile, but Valda went on eagerly : 'I do indeed ! It delights me to hear your interesting stories about happy English girls who may choose their own husbands, and enjoy all sorts of exciting experiences before they are obliged to marry and settle down.'

I only wish I could spend more time with you ; but I have so little time for myself. The *hammâm* (bath) takes up a great deal of the morning, and I have to cut out the dresses and look after the sewing of nearly the whole household, and in the afternoon my mother likes me to be with her, to go out driving, or to receive visitors. You know they often stay on until quite late in the evening, and then I am tired out, and I have to sit with the Pâsha. You know how somebody is always wanting me ?'

'Yes,' said Margaret, 'I have noticed that your time is fully filled up. You have not much leisure.'

'If I could have you to go out driving with me sometimes instead of Nâzla Hânem,' Valda said upon a sudden impulse ; 'she has not a word to say for herself the whole time, and I am so tired of her. But I couldn't ask you,—you would not like to wear the *yâshmâk*, would you?'

She looked at Margaret with an expression of shy appeal in her beautiful eyes. She was always very much afraid of exceeding her prerogatives, and she was careful not to make any demands that could possibly be objectionable to the English lady, but her eagerness about this was evident, and Margaret could not help responding to it with a smile.

'I should not mind in the least,' she said ; 'why should I ? The *yâshmâk* is not a bit thicker than many English veils, and it is most becoming and picturesque. I should like to go out with you, and I think it would be an amusing experience to dress up as a Turkish lady.'

Valda clapped her hands with joy. 'Delightful!' she exclaimed. 'We will go out this very afternoon! I wish I had known that you would not object, I would have asked you before. The Pâsha doesn't like me to drive out with any one in European costume—it makes one so much more recognisable—but now he will be pleased. What a good thing that he has left me the *coupé*! Hamîda Hânem is not going to stay long this afternoon, and I will make my escape before any more visitors arrive. I will order one of the eunuchs to send word to the coachman, and you will tell Ayôosha to get Djemâl-ed-Dîn ready, won't you? It would be nice to take him with us.'

'But the Pâsha,' objected Margaret; 'I haven't given him any English lesson this morning, and supposing he wants it this afternoon——?'

'He has gone out driving with some English officers to the Ghiseh Gardens, and he won't be back till late,—that was what he came to tell me at luncheon—so that is all right, my dear. And now I will go to Hamîda Hânem; and will you see that Djêmal gets his sleep? Then as soon as he wakes we will start.'

## CHAPTER IV

It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and the south wing of the palace, which contained the Pâsha's private suite of rooms, was deserted. His Excellency was out, and Valda was still with her mother on the other side. The Circassians were busy with preparations for an approaching wedding, and they too had gathered together on the other side, to take counsel about the new silk dresses they were making for themselves. Margaret was the only person left in the whole long suite of wide, empty rooms. Ayôosha had dressed the little Djemâl-ed-Din, who had awakened from a long sleep, flushed, rosy, and rather cross, and she was now hurrying through the garden, carrying him in her arms, while her voice came up through the open windows calling to Margaret to follow quickly.

'*Châbuk* (quick), Mademoiselle, *châbuk!*' she cried, but Margaret lingered a moment longer. Sacêda Khâlfâ, Valda's own especial slave, had brought her a delicate pink turban, the work of Valda's own hands, and with deft manipulations and the aid of many pins, had transformed her in a few minutes into a Turkish lady.

‘*Guzâil*, Marmozelle, *pek guzâil*! (pretty—very pretty),’ the girl said with laughing admiration, and then she picked up the cloak and veil laid out for Valda, and took them across to the other side.

Margaret stood for a moment before one of the long mirrors in Valda’s sitting-room, and surveyed herself with a smile. The long cloak of rich black silk that covered her dress down to her feet was a French and entirely modern garment, but above it, filling in the heart-shaped opening in which the cloak was cut in front, and descending from her turban over her forehead, was an arrangement of clear white muslin, which, though exceedingly simple, had an astonishingly becoming and picturesque effect. Her eyes looked out between the two veils, and she laughed at herself in such strange guise. Then she picked up her gloves in a hurry, and flying through the empty rooms, almost ran against the Pâsha in the corridor. He was coming out of the *selâmlek*, and he stopped short in surprise as he found himself face to face with a veiled lady who was not his wife.

‘*Dêstur*,’ he exclaimed hastily, and then as the lady neither screamed nor ran away, recognition and amusement flashed suddenly into his eyes. ‘*Mademoiselle*, it is you!’ he said in astonishment. ‘I did not know you in the least. You are going out in that costume?’

‘Yes, for a drive with Madame. She thought you would be out this afternoon, and would not want to read English; but if you do, Pâsha——’

‘Not at all ; I am going out, but I had to attend an audience of the Khedive first, and now I have come back to change into cooler clothes. Go by all means, and may you enjoy yourself ; you have the air of a person bent upon some great dissipation.’

He stood for a moment, barring her way to the staircase, and looking at her with a half smile in his melancholy blue eyes. He was a short man, and he was not without that inclination to stoutness which assails so many of his nation as they approach the prime of life ; but he was nevertheless a great Turk, and he had the distinction of manner noticeable in most of the great men of all nations. He was usually dressed rather carelessly in light gray summer clothes that were the handiwork of English tailors, but this afternoon he had just come from a levée at the Abdin Palace, and he was wearing the splendid uniform of a Turkish general, faced with crimson and gold, and covered with decorations. As he stood there, stiff and straight and soldierly, with his sword by his side and the stars on his breast, and a smile in his blue eyes, Margaret was struck by his appearance, and a sudden wonder and regret came over her. He was considerably over forty, and his moustache was gray, but he was still a handsome man, and a gallant soldier that any wife might have been proud of. How was it that Valda——

‘Do you know, Mademoiselle,’ said the Pâsha suddenly, ‘that costume suits you remarkably well ? You make an enchanting Turkish lady.’

He had been studying her appearance while



she waited for him to move out of her way, but Margaret had been too deep in her own reflections to be aware of it, and she was unprepared for the compliment. The colour deepened on her cheeks beneath the transparent muslin, and her gray eyes, that were her prettiest point, looked up from under their straight, delicately drawn brows with an expression half startled, half pleased. For once she did look pretty, and the Pâsha was perfectly sincere in his admiration. 'Most charming,' he repeated, smiling at the confusion which left her without a reply. '*Adieu, Mademoiselle, bon amusement!*' And with the courtly bow which he had acquired during his long residence as a young man in a foreign country, he passed on.

Margaret, flying quickly down the stairs and across the garden, presented herself on the other side with roses in her cheeks that were a sufficient justification of her refusal to let Sacêda put any rouge on. She found Valda robing herself in a great hurry in the little dark chamber of one of the Nubian servants in the basement of the palace.

'Oh, here you are, Mademoiselle——how nice you look! Really the *yâshmâk* is most becoming to you. It almost reconciles me to wearing it to see you in it. Imagine, that tiresome Hamîda Hânem has only just gone, and a whole set of ladies have arrived. I only escaped with the greatest difficulty, and we must go out by the back way to avoid being seen.'

The little side-door, which opened out of the Nubian's den into the shade of the orange and pomegranate trees of the outer garden, was

admirably adapted for surreptitious exits and entrances, and they passed out unseen between the close shrubberies. In a wide courtyard at the back of the palace a closed carriage with two splendid black horses was waiting, and an Arab coachman in a richly embroidered crimson livery sat on the box. Manetîna, the huge Soudanese who always attended the ladies in their excursions abroad, lifted in the little Djemâl-ed-Din, and placed him on Margaret's knee, and then he took his place by the coachman, and the carriage dashed out under the archway along the road that led in the direction of the Kasr-il-Nîl Bridge.

Valda was in high spirits at having made good her escape, and drawing down the blinds of the windows a little way, so that she could look out without being too much seen, she threw herself back into a corner of the carriage.

'I hope you don't mind having Djêmal on your knee, Mademoiselle?' she asked anxiously. 'If you find him heavy you must hand him over to me.'

But Margaret was getting very fond of the little Djêmal, and it was so rarely that he would consent to sit on her knee, that she felt it something of a treat to have him. She pressed a kiss upon his golden curls, and watched with a sense of pride and pleasure the looks of interest and admiration that he attracted from the passers-by. Dressed in a pale pink pelisse that set off his creamy skin and great brown eyes, he was indeed a fine little fellow, and he carried himself with a dignity well befitting his diamonds. Ayôosha had persuaded

him to relinquish most of his decorations before he went to sleep, but from one large diamond star, the very beautiful one that his mother had given him first, he had obstinately refused to be parted. He seemed to have set his affections on that star, and he had insisted upon having it pinned on to the front of his best frock. It glittered now on his left breast, and the beautiful baby face looked out above it, surveying with serious gravity the strange world of the crowded streets.

‘Djêmal is always good when he is taken out driving,’ said his mother, ‘but he is not amusing. He looks at everything, and he never speaks a word. I want to know what he is thinking about, but it is no use asking him ; he will not answer a word. Look, Bey-jim, there are the English soldiers that you are so fond of !’

They were passing the great court of the Kasr-il-Nil barracks, where a company of English soldiers in kharki were going through their drill. Djemâled-Din watched them with rapt attention, a world of thought in the deep wells of his eyes, and Margaret knew that as soon as he got home he would call together a band of the slaves, and marshal them about in exact imitation of the movements that he now witnessed ; but he did not utter a word.

The carriage rolled swiftly on, past the windows of the many-storied square building, where the men of the North Staffordshire Regiment might be seen staring out, in various stages of undress, upon the crowd below ; then on to the bridge across the Nile, with its endless stream of humanity of every

race and type for ever crossing and recrossing. The *syces* ran in front to clear the way, for the bridge that afternoon was a scene of pandemonium. Besides the press of Arabs, Negroes, and Europeans of all nations that overflowed from the side walks, and the throng of carriages and donkeys and bicycles in the road, a long string of camels was coming in from the desert to supply the Government for a coming campaign ; and the wild-looking Bedouins, who were perched on their backs, came on in calm, impassive dignity, making all the world give way before them.

The air was full of the rumours of war ; but that only seemed to quicken the full pulses of social life in Cairo, and the stream of fashionable equipages in the park on the further bank of the Nile had never been fuller. Smartly-dressed English ladies, whose fair complexions looked all the fairer from the contrast with the dark faces around them ; French and Italian beauties, less fair, but more marvellously attired ; stout Pâshas on ambling ponies, and slight Egyptian princes driving high dog-carts—the whole world of Cairo, high and low, was abroad that afternoon in the wide drive under the spreading acacias ; and the bare-legged outrunners, in their flowing white draperies and embroidered jackets, flew on in front, calling general attention to the approach of rank and fashion.

Between the graceful stems of a grove of palms that fringed the bank of the Nile was a beautiful view of the city on the other side of the river, its white palaces, mosques, and minarets shining along

the water's edge, and the Citadel, crowned with the great dome and slender minarets of the mosque of Mohâmméd Ali, standing out against the rosy heights of the Mocattam hills. It was all steeped in the intense golden light of the setting sun, and the exquisite effect of colour was something never to be forgotten. Margaret had never seen this view before, and she wanted to look at nothing else ; but Valda was more interested in the carriages that were dashing past, and her conversation was all about the people in them.

‘Yes, it is a beautiful view,’ she said ; ‘but if one looks on that side, one misses all the carriages that meet us, and I want to see who is here. It is Friday, luckily, and Fridays and Sundays are the best days—we shall see all the world. Ah ! there is the Comtesse C. all in white, with a figure like a girl of eighteen, and she is certainly a long way over sixty,—really these English ladies are wonderful !’

‘Is she English ?’ asked Margaret.

‘Oh yes, she is English ; she has married a Frenchman, but she is English herself, like most of the great ladies here. They say she goes to Paris twice a year for her complexion, and it seems to be worth while ; she gets a good effect from a little distance. She comes to see me sometimes, but I think it is more for my husband's sake than mine. She is quite devoted to him, but he does not admire her artificial charms, and he is not particularly grateful.’

‘That is a compliment to you that you ought to appreciate,’ remarked Margaret.

‘Oh, I don’t know, I don’t think I should very much mind—ah, look, look quick, Mademoiselle! That thin, dark young man in the high dog-cart, did you observe him? That is Prince G.’

‘And the pretty fashionable woman with him, is she the Princess?’

‘Oh dear no, he is not married. And she,—but surely you have heard about Mrs. X.? It is a scandal that everybody knows; but of course this is your first winter here, and you have not had time to hear about anything yet.’

It was little indeed that Margaret knew about Cairo scandals, but she heard plenty in the next half-hour. Valda seemed to know all the notorieties of the town, and she recounted their histories and discussed the skeletons in their cupboards with a mastery of the subject and a knowledge of details that amazed the English girl. ‘How do you know all this, Hânem?’ she asked. ‘Where can you possibly hear all these stories?’

‘Oh, we know all that goes on,’ Valda answered smiling; ‘we are not quite so ignorant as these European ladies imagine. They amuse me so much when they come to call, and talk to us as if we were like little children. And all the time we know all about them, and all about their husbands’ little comedies,—things that they do not even guess at.’

Margaret was silent. She did not think that such discourse was at all edifying; but knowing that she would do no good by expressing her opinion, she changed the subject by pointing out a very smart brougham with a spirited pair of grays that was coming up.

‘Oh, that is Mûrad Âli Pâsha’s carriage,’ said Valda. ‘Hamîda told me that she meant to take a turn round. Yes, there she is, and the old Anâna with her.’

A vision of smiling eyes and delicate colours under white muslin veils flashed past, and Valda leaned forward a little to give a bow of recognition; but the next moment she threw herself back into her corner with an exclamation of displeasure and indignation.

‘That impertinent man! Did you see? That man on the gray horse—he reined back so as to look right into the carriage,—as if we were wild beasts, curiosities to be stared at!’

Margaret had noticed before this that many curious eyes had been bent upon their equipage, and that Djemâl-ed-Din with his diamonds was not the sole object of attraction. Cairo was crowded during the season with visitors who were anxious to see all that was strange and foreign, and the sight of a Pâsha’s carriage with a glimpse of white head-dresses and dark eyes inside, which was the only possibility of seeing anything of a *harîm*, was a temptation not to be resisted. Valda had been sitting so carefully back in her corner that it was not easy to catch even a passing glimpse of her face, and Margaret had been rather amused as she noticed the eager glances directed at her, to think that so many people were taking the trouble to turn their heads round under the delusion that they were gazing at an Oriental beauty. She had noticed the man whose attention had offended Valda, and she had been struck by his appearance.

He was riding a powerful gray horse on the path under the trees on Valda's side of the road, and there had been something very marked about his action, but he did not look as if he belonged to the irresponsible company of tourists.

'Do you know, Hânem, I really don't think that he meant to be impertinent,' Margaret said. 'It was only that he happened to catch sight of you as you looked out to bow to Hamîda Hânem, and he was taken by surprise. He looked like a person who had seen a vision.'

'How absurd !' said Valda incredulously ; but she suffered herself to be pacified by the explanation, and, as she thought over it, a dimple of amusement became visible through the thin muslin that veiled her cheek. They had by this time passed the grounds of the Ghesireh Palace, which was the goal of a great many of the fashionable equipages, and when they reached the further side of the circling avenue the road became emptier. The hour was growing late, and the carriages were beginning to stream back over the Kasr-il-Nil bridge. There were fewer celebrities to observe now, and Valda's interest in those that there were seemed to have suffered eclipse.

'He was in the Khedivial uniform, but he was an Englishman, and he was remarkably handsome, wasn't he?' she observed suddenly, after a long silence. 'Tall, with blue eyes, and a fair moustache, and such a distinguished look about him, he must have been an Englishman.'

'Who? Oh, that man on the gray horse?' said Margaret, whose thoughts had wandered from



the subject. 'Was he? I don't know. I did not notice his features very particularly, but I thought he looked like a gentleman. I suppose he was an Englishman.'

'Oh yes, my dear, an Englishman and of the best class; there are not too many of that kind,' said Valda, and she looked out rather wistfully across the enclosure which was fast being deserted. 'The carriages are all returning, and if we go back now we might drive to Esbekiah with the others before we go home. Would you like to turn back, Mademoiselle? It seems hardly worth while going the whole round of the park now that it is deserted, does it?'

Margaret had no choice in the matter, and she would readily have acceded to the proposition; but the little autocrat upon her knee had views of his own about it, and he had to be reckoned with. He had not opened his mouth once hitherto, but now he made himself heard very distinctly.

'*Kúchuk Ana*, we have got to get out and walk under the trees before we go home,' he said seriously.

Valda clasped her hands with a gesture of dismay. '*Oh, mon Dieu!* He came with us last time when I brought my mother, that she might have a little exercise, and he remembers!' she explained. 'But, Djemâl-jim, that was in the morning when there was no one there; we are not going to get out to-day.'

'We must get out,' said Djemâl-ed-Din decisively, and he pointed his tiny finger at the path under the trees.

‘Not to-day, Djemâl-ed-Din ; haven’t you heard your mother say so ?’ said Margaret firmly. ‘Now we are going to drive into the town, and you will see the lights and the soldiers and all sorts of things that you like.’

Djemâl-ed-Din was beginning to recognise the decisiveness of Margaret’s decrees, and perhaps if he had been alone with her he might have yielded the point without much ado ; but in the presence of his mother he knew his power, and he remained inexorable. Valda saw that he was preparing to howl, and she gave in ignominiously. ‘We must get out for a few moments,’ she said, turning to Margaret. ‘It will be better than to have him yelling all over the course the whole way back. I don’t like doing it in the afternoon, but luckily there are not any people about now. We will get out here in this quiet place.’

She pulled the check-string as she spoke, and the carriage drew up under the trees by the side of the road.

## CHAPTER V

THE sunset lights were deepening every moment into intenser glories; but the rapid Egyptian twilight was beginning to creep over the eastern sky, and under the shade of the giant acacias, which interlaced their branches overhead, the road was already growing dusk. The two ladies, in white head-dresses and long black cloaks, left their carriage drawn up on the grass in the shade, and with the slave in attendance, walked along a narrow footpath that ran along the edge of the raised causeway. The little Bey clung to his mother's hand, and as the negro was with them, and she knew that the child would have nothing to say to her while he could have his mother, Margaret lingered to look at the sharp outlines of the two great Pyramids which stood out in splendid simplicity against the sunset sky. Below the dyke on which she stood were fields of clover and springing corn stretching, like a plain of living emerald, across the valley to the foot of the low line of purple hills that shut them in from the limitless desert. The sharp peaks of the Pyramids on the horizon were changing from blue to violet, and, as she looked at them, Margaret was held by the

spell of the illimitable antiquity that makes Egypt such a strange land of enchantment.

A blue mist, rising up from the valley, added a still more magical effect to the loveliness of the evening, but it brought with it a sudden chill that made itself felt in the atmosphere, and Valda, who knew by experience how serious were the risks of a chill at such a time, became uneasy about Djemâl-ed-Din, and regretted having brought him out without a wrap. She despatched the attendant to summon the carriage, which was some distance behind, and took the boy by the hand to lead him back to meet it.

‘Come, Effên’, we have left Mademoiselle behind,’ she said. ‘Let us walk back towards her until the carriage comes.’

But Djemâl-ed-Din, who had not had enough of freedom yet, was in a perverse mood. He looked back in the direction in which they had been walking, and saw a party of horsemen coming round the bend of the avenue, one rider mounted on a high-stepping gray horse a little in front of the rest.

‘Soldiers, *kûchuk Ana!*’ he exclaimed eagerly. ‘I want to see the soldiers go by,’ and wrenching his hand from his mother’s clasp, he ran a few steps away from her towards the other side of the road.

Margaret, who was only a few yards away, turned round at the sound of galloping hoofs, and uttered a cry of alarm as she saw Djemâl-ed-Din in the middle of the road. She flew to help Valda, but the cavalcade was already upon them, and there was nothing that would stop them. The foremost rider, arrested by the evident alarm and

distress of the two ladies, had indeed reined his horse sharply in upon his haunches, but those who came behind him were of another class. They were a party of English tourists returning from the Pyramids in wild spirits, riding recklessly, filling the air with shouts and laughter, their hats on the backs of their heads, and their puggarees streaming in the wind, just as Valda had described them. She might well dislike them. They saw the Turkish lady rushing across the road to get to her child, but they made no attempt to check their headlong course, and flew past, laughing rudely, and bespattering her with mud.

When Margaret came up they had gone past, and Valda stood half fainting on the further side of the causeway. Djemâl-ed-Din, however, was safe. The tall Englishman, who had been riding alone in front, had dismounted in time to catch him up in the very middle of the cloud of dust and the confusion of galloping hoofs ; and leading his horse by the bridle-rein, he now came towards Valda, holding the child in his arms.

‘Permit me, Madame,’ he said in French, ‘to apologise for a piece of rudeness which makes me blush for my countrymen.’

Valda recognised the officer in Khedivial uniform whose notice had annoyed her a short time before, and she saw too that he had recognised her, but she had not a word to say. She merely held out her arms for her child. They stood for a moment so, for Djemâl-ed-Din showed no particular anxiety to leave his place of shelter. He was a strange child, and singularly courageous

for his age. It was partly, perhaps, from the intense pride which was such an unchildlike characteristic in him that he seemed unable to imagine the possibility of any harm befalling him; perhaps he felt himself a person of too great importance; at any rate, baby though he was, he did not seem to know what fear meant, and his beautiful little face, undisturbed by alarm, was turned towards the handsome countenance of his protector with an expression of serious consideration in which appreciation and approval were plainly manifest.

Valda held out her arms for her child, forgetting in her agitation to cover her face, as at another time she would have done; and the English officer looked on a loveliness that went beyond his wildest dreams. The folds of the *yâshmâk* were still round her brow, but the light pierced through it, and the rest of the veil had slipped from its place in her hasty rush across the road. Her wonderful hair escaped in little unmanageable curls from the confining muslin, and gleamed like threads of living gold in the deep orange light of the after-glow, while her great brown eyes shone like stars out of the fair half-veiled face.

The English stranger looked, and tried to disengage the little clinging arms round his neck; but he could not speak, and it was Margaret who broke the too expressive silence.

‘Thank you, thank you a thousand times!’ she said hurriedly. ‘We can never thank you enough for saving the child,—but oh, for Heaven’s sake do not linger here. Djemâl-ed-Din, let the

gentleman go this moment,—look, here is Manetinna coming, and there is the carriage.'

She spoke in English, and the Englishman started and threw a glance of astonishment at the speaker whose accents contradicted her dress so strangely and unexpectedly; but the urgency of her appeal recalled him to the situation, and forcibly unloosing Djemâl-ed-Din's clutching little fingers, he restored him to his mother's arms. He gave one more look into Valda's beautiful, agitated face, then, with a silent bow, he turned away, and, springing into his saddle, galloped off.

The negro, who had seen the concluding scene of the little drama, but not what had led up to it, came rushing to the rescue with black rage and dismay painted upon his ugly countenance. He was a grotesque-looking creature even for a Soudanese, for the characteristics of his race were all exaggerated in him. His protruding lips were thicker, his flat little nose was more spreading, and his bumpy forehead was more baby-like than one often sees even in Africans, while in colour he was the deepest, sootiest black. His animal cast of countenance usually wore an expression of sleepy good-nature and heavy self-satisfaction; but now it was disfigured into the likeness of a demon, and the whites of his eyes rolled horribly as he hurled curses upon the father, the grandfather, and all the ancestors of the infidel intruder.

He would not listen to Margaret's attempt at an explanation, but turning to his mistress, desired her roughly to get into the carriage. Valda had been standing as if in a dream, with the little boy

in her arms, looking straight before her with a dazed look in her eyes, but the menace in the negro's tone seemed to bring her to herself. Telling Margaret to get in, she handed Djemâled-Din to her, and then turned with lightning in her eyes upon the black lout who was holding open the carriage door.

'Dog!' she said, 'worse than dog that you are,—pig! Why were you not in the way to save your master's child when he was in danger of being run over by the horses of the infidels? You did not see it, did you? No! you and Abdûllah, idle dogs both of you, come dawdling up behind, and leave the charge of guarding your mistress to a chance stranger. What will the Pâsha say to that when he hears it, do you think? You allow a strange man to look on the face of your master's wife, and think to carry it off by scolding and cursing,—but it shall not serve you. The Pâsha shall hear the truth from me and from Mademoiselle, and he will believe us; he knows that Mademoiselle never tells a lie.'

The countenance of the negro had changed completely during this speech, and his fury suddenly gave place to abject terror. He had not been really to blame, for he had only done the bidding of his mistress in going to fetch the carriage; but he knew that it would be upon the facts and not upon his intentions that he would be judged, and that no excuses would avail to exonerate him. The Pâsha would believe the united testimony of his wife and the English Mademoiselle, and the whole blame would fall upon him. As he



realised the potency of Valda's threat, he flung himself upon the ground, and catching up the hem of her dress, he pressed it to his lips with a passionate appeal for pardon. 'Oh, day of mud, obscuring fifty days of sun!—oh, my broken heart, my miserable head,—I lay it in the dust at your feet! Only pardon me, Effenden! Have mercy upon me, and do not ruin me with the Pâsha!'

'Go and take your place upon the box, and see that you behave better in future,' said Valda disdainfully. 'For this once I will spare you,—but mind, it is only on condition that you keep silence yourself. You and Abdûllah too, see that you never breathe a word of this matter to a human soul; it will be better for both of you!'

The negro was effectually cowed, and Valda took her place in the carriage, secure in the certainty that neither he nor the coachman would give any further trouble in the matter; but Margaret, who understood enough Turkish to be able to gather what was the drift of the colloquy, had listened to it with astonishment and mis-giving.

'Hânem,' she said earnestly, as the horses dashed off, and they sped through the darkening avenues, 'you surely do not intend to keep this incident a secret from the Pâsha? You have done nothing wrong; why should you not tell him the whole story? He cannot blame you.'

'He would blame somebody, my dear; if not me, then you,—if not you, then Manetîнна,—or perhaps even Djemâl-ed-Din! Djêmâl was certainly naughty, and his father would be angry with him

for causing the calamity; he might even whip him. No! the Pâsha must never hear of this affair.'

'But supposing he *should* hear of it, supposing that, by some accident that you do not foresee, the knowledge of it should come to his ears, and he found that you had concealed it, how much worse, how infinitely more serious that would be! What might he not think, what might he not suspect? I entreat of you, Valda, let us tell him the whole matter straightforwardly, exactly as it occurred, and face at once any disagreeable consequences that may be involved. The Pâsha is a reasonable being, and he is a most affectionate father; he will never do anything that can do the least harm to Djemâled-Din——'

'Ah, Mademoiselle, you do not know what you are saying! It is not only Djêmal,—it is you and me, and Manetîna and Abdûllah, *and* that English gentleman. You do not know what it is to a Turk to have his wife stared at by a stranger. It is an insult and an injury,—it is a calamity—and I do not know *what* the Pâsha might not do. He might seek out that officer, he would certainly never be happy in his mind so long as he thought that he remained in Cairo, and he would set a watch upon all my movements. He might prevent you from ever going out again with me; he would suspect all sorts of things. Oh no, no, no! It is out of the question that the Pâsha should be told.'

Valda spoke with the decision of one used to command, and most girls in Margaret's position would have given in without further argument; but Margaret came of a fighting and commanding

stock herself, and her gray eyes lightened into opposition.

‘It does not matter what he does, so long as you can feel that you are in the right,’ she said resolutely. ‘Don’t you see that by telling him you disarm suspicion at once, and make him see the matter as it really happened without any fault of yours? Whereas if any inkling of it reaches him in any other way,—good heavens, Valda, can you bear to think that you have got a secret from the Pâsha, a secret that is known to Manetîнна and Abdûllah? Can you endure to feel that you are in the power of those two low creatures——’

‘I shall not be in their power; it is they who will be in mine,’ said Valda. ‘Do not be afraid; I hold them in the hollow of my hand, and there is no fear of their saying anything. They know that it would be their word against yours and mine, that it is we who have most influence with the Pâsha. Thanks be to God, he trusts us more than them, and they know it. You may make your mind quite easy, Mademoiselle.’

‘My mind can never be easy with a secret upon it,’ said Margaret; ‘and this is such a harmless matter. Why need you make a secret of it? The Pâsha is a sensible man, and he would see how it was. It seems to me that you are making a mountain out of a molehill. After all it is such a trifle——’

‘A trifle!’ Valda ejaculated with a little laugh. ‘Ah, Mademoiselle, you say that because you do not know our ways; that shows that you do not know what you are saying. The Pâsha

wouldn't think it a trifle, I can assure you of that.'

'Well,' said Margaret uncompromisingly, 'it seems a trifle to me, and I think it is foolish to risk being dragged into any deceit on account of it. If the Pâsha asks me anything about it, I shall tell him everything. You said to Manetînna just now that I never told a lie to the Pâsha, and it was true. I am not going to begin now.'

Valda turned suddenly round upon her companion with a haughty bend of her neck, and for the first time since she had been with her, Margaret saw the beautiful eyes bent upon her in scorn and anger.

'Have I asked you to tell a lie? Have I asked you to do anything but to mind your own business and to leave me to manage mine?' she said proudly; but as she met Margaret's eyes, which were full of pain, she broke down suddenly, and her eyes filled with tears. 'Oh, Mademoiselle,' she cried, clasping the hand that was holding little Djemâl-ed-Din, 'you are my friend, you are the one person whom I trust! Do not be the one to turn against me! You do not know what trouble you will bring upon me if you do.'

Margaret could not help being softened by this appeal, and as she saw that her remonstrances were futile she desisted from further argument. 'I could never turn against you, Hânem,' she said gently; 'you know that I care for you too much. I was only advising you to do what seemed to me the best and wisest thing, but of course if you are determined against it, I can say nothing.'

‘ You need say nothing, dear. The Pâsha will ask no questions, and he will never know ; no one will ever know, and we shall have no trouble. Simply keep silence,—that is so easy, and that is all I ask. Believe me it is better so ; our ways are not your ways.’

They were not indeed. Margaret had discovered that very soon ; and she had found it not a little difficult to pursue a straight course amidst the crooked ways of her surroundings. From the most insignificant little negro up to the Hânem Effendi herself, every person in the palace was full of plots and plans and intrigues,—very harmless intrigues generally, but still intrigues. The slaves knew that the little coffee-parties that they held among themselves when their mistresses were safely out of the way were no harm, but they preferred to have them secretly rather than ask permission : the ladies preferred to wink at these proceedings rather than countenance them by recognition ; and everybody all round was ready to wink at everybody else’s peccadilloes on the tacit understanding that a free margin should be allowed for their own vagaries. Of course every now and then some accident would occur. Djemâl-ed-Din would fall down and hurt himself through the negligence of one of the younger slaves, in whose charge he had been left while his nurse was feasting with the other slaves ; or there would be none left of some particular delicacy that the Hânem Effendi fancied for supper, because the other ladies had been going all day to the cupboard to regale themselves upon it—and then the whole thing would come out, and a

commotion would ensue. The aggrieved person would scold and threaten and storm, and there would be trouble in the *harim*,—everybody incriminated turning upon everybody else, trying to shift the blame or to pay off old scores ; and then there would be strict rules laid down, which were to be as the laws of the Medes and Persians. These would be enforced for a few days, everybody, from Valda herself to the impish Nubian boy, suffering under the discomfort and inconvenience of them ; and then, as the remembrance of the uproar subsided, the rules would be relaxed, and everything would go on smoothly and mysteriously as before.

These little peculiarities of the Turkish character, it may be remarked in passing, are not confined to the privacy of the *harim* alone, and they may account for much that is baffling in the politics of the Ottoman Empire ; but to a person like Margaret, who was moderate in her desires and fearless of rebuke, it was perfectly incomprehensible. If she wanted anything it was her habit to ask for it ; and if there was any reason against asking for it, she either did without it, or counted the cost and did the thing openly, taking care to mention the fact to the authorities afterwards. Such extraordinary simplicity as this was a puzzle and a mystery to the Oriental mind, and at first everybody thought that it must be intended to conceal some particularly deep-laid policy ; but by degrees it became evident that the English Mademoiselle had no ulterior designs, and they learned to set it down as an outlandish idiosyncrasy. English people

were like that, they supposed ; and though it was highly inconvenient sometimes to have to do with a person who had no little secret weaknesses to give anybody a hold over her, there were advantages in such a character which became very apparent to the heads of the household as they learned to know her better.

Margaret had leisure to reflect over the strange conditions of the life in which she had to play a part, for Valda was not inclined to talk during the homeward drive. As the carriage dashed through the lighted streets of the town she leaned back in her corner in absolute silence, and the only remark that she made was when they passed under the archway into the palace gardens, and were at home again.

‘*Un vrai gentilhomme Anglais,—il n’y en a pas de plus comme il faut!*’ she said half to herself, and then turning quickly to Margaret, ‘Did you not remark it, Mademoiselle? Ah, *mon Dieu*, yes. You must have remarked it this time. He had the air of a prince,—he was so handsome and distinguished,—do you not think so?’

‘Oh, I don’t know,’ said Margaret, who noticed with some disquietude the flush upon Valda’s cheek that made her look so beautiful. ‘He was good-looking, certainly, but that goes for nothing in England. You find handsome men in every class and every profession, even pork-butchers——’

‘Oh, pork-butchers! Allah, Allah, Allah! That is too horrible a suggestion, Mademoiselle. How unsympathetic you are! Your silence sentiment with your allusions to such atrocities. My poor

little Djêmal, am I to conclude that it is a pork-butcher who has rescued you? No, no!’

Margaret laughed, not sorry for the diversion. It was her desire to silence sentiment, and she hoped that she might never hear of this matter any more. The incident was at an end, and there was no possible link by which Valda’s interest in it could be continued. Margaret told herself that there was nothing to be afraid of, and that she might safely dismiss the vague sense of uneasiness that haunted her; still it did haunt her, and it was not lessened by a discovery made when Djemâl-ed-Din was being undressed. Ayôosha had carried him across to his mother’s rooms, and as she divested him of his little pelisse, she pointed out that the diamond star was missing. Had the Hânem Effendi taken it off for safety? Margaret stood dismayed, and even Valda turned a little pale.

‘No, I have not got it, and that star is the largest and most beautiful that I have,’ she said with a little gasp. ‘Surely he cannot have lost it!’

‘It may have come off in the carriage, it will probably be found on the floor or on the seat,’ Margaret said; but Djemâl-ed-Din negatived this suggestion very decidedly. ‘No, Mademoiselle, it is not there—*yok, yok* (it isn’t—it isn’t)!’ he said, shaking his head with the confidence of absolute certainty.

Ayôosha had been standing by, wringing her hands and lamenting loudly after the fashion of the slaves, with her mobile features contorted until they were like an agonised gargoyle; but at the



little Bey's interposition she checked herself suddenly. 'It is not in the carriage; where is it, then, Bey-jim?' she asked persuasively.

The child turned his great eyes upon her, and pursed up his lips with an air that seemed to say that he could reveal a good deal if he chose, but was not inclined to do so. He did not answer her, and Ayôosha lost patience with him. 'You very naughty, bad child!' she cried, with one of the sudden changes of mood that she was given to. '*Pek fênna* *chôjuk* (very bad child), give up the diamonds directly, or we will tell the Pâsha and he will whip you!'

Djemâl-ed-Din's beautiful little face changed instantly at this threat, and his delicate mouth began to quiver; but his mother bent down towards him reassuringly. 'Tell *kûchuk Ana* where you think the star is, Djêmâl-jim,' she said tenderly. 'Is it lost?'

'No, *kûchuk Ana*, not lost,' he said, his face clearing in a moment.

'Where is it then, my little one!'

Djemâl-ed-Din looked shy. He hesitated for a moment, then he said naïvely: 'The English Captain has got it.'

'The English Captain!'

'Yes, *kûchuk Ana*,' cried the child proudly, 'I gave it him. It came off, and I had it in my hand, and I put it in his pocket, the little pocket in his coat just here.' Djemâl-ed-Din touched the left breast of his little brown coat, and looked up to note the effect of this announcement. The three women stood round him with surprise and

consternation written legibly on their faces. 'The English Captain was a splendid captain,' continued the boy appealingly. 'He was beautiful, and he was kind; I loved him, and I gave him my star.'

Then to the astonishment of Margaret, Valda bent down, and catching the little fellow up in her arms, covered his face with swift kisses.

'*Ma sh'allah, ma sh'allah* (God bless you, God bless you),' she said with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, 'my noble little boy! He saved your life and you wished to reward him! Who will say that a child has no sense? He knew better what was right to be done than any of us.'

'But the star—the Pâsha!'

It was from Ayôosha that this murmur escaped, and Valda turned upon her with an instantaneous change of expression. 'The star was mine,' she said imperiously; 'it was one of the jewels that I had from my father,—God be praised for it!—and the Pâsha has nothing to do with it. Mind, Ayôosha, not a word about this to him or to any one else. Mademoiselle, I know I may trust you.'

Margaret was obliged to assent, but it was against her own judgment, and she said quietly: 'I believe you are making a mistake.'

## CHAPTER VI

‘АНА, Mademoiselle, behold you are *à la Franca* to-day, *une Anglaise des Anglaises*; but I liked you best as I saw you yesterday *à la Turquie*!’

It was the morning after that eventful drive, and Margaret had come in from the garden to give the Pâsha his English lesson. He knew very little English, but he was an eager student, and he gave such close attention to his work, that it was a pleasure to teach him. He spoke French and German fluently, and Margaret looked forward to the hour that she spent with him as to one of the pleasantest in her day; it was her one opportunity of intercourse with a cultivated and intellectual mind, and she enjoyed it. The curious views that he held, and the strange stamp that modern ideas received in his mind, made his conversation particularly interesting and original, and he was so kind and considerate that Margaret could feel perfectly at her ease when she was with him. To-day for the first time she learned what it was to feel embarrassment in his presence.

‘And how did you enjoy your drive yesterday?’ he asked as she was looking out the books that she wanted. ‘Did you have any adventures by the way?’

It was merely a question asked in jest, and the Pâsha did not expect any serious answer ; but Margaret felt her colour rising uncomfortably, and she was glad that he could not see her face as she stood at his writing-table. 'What adventures could I have, Monsieur?' she answered. 'I saw many Turks, but you were the only one who saw me, I think.'

'I? Ah, I am a safe person! But you are right; there is no possibility of adventures for Turkish ladies. And it is well that it is so, for the only ones that could happen would be bad ones. What are you searching for, Mademoiselle? I have got all the books here. Come and sit down; my wife has gone to the *hammâm* and will not be wanting you this morning, so we can have a good long lesson.'

The Pâsha had already cast off his slippers, and seated himself cross-legged upon the white-sheeted divân, and Margaret settled herself in her place on the other side of the big bolster down the middle of the couch. This fashion of sitting cross-legged had been a little difficult to her, and the position struck her as a ludicrous one at first; but as she grew accustomed to it, she found it extremely comfortable, especially in the evenings when it afforded her feet a blessed respite from the mosquitoëes. She curled herself up quite happily, therefore, and gave a sigh of satisfaction as she settled down among the cushions, for she had been out in the garden for a long time, and she was tired. It was a delicious morning, but it was getting too hot for comfort out of doors, even in the shade of the

orange trees ; and it was pleasant to sit in the cool, green light of the shaded room, and listen to the music of bird and bee and childish laughter floating in with the scent of frangipani and mignonette through the wide-opened windows.

The Pâsha was reading aloud a description of an English Christmas, and the remembrance of what the weather was like in England at this moment served to heighten Margaret's sense of well-being by the contrast that it presented ; but she could not help smiling at the extraordinary version of Christmas customs and festivities that she was listening to. This reading-book was one that the Pâsha had himself somehow or other got hold of, and it was evidently composed by some foreigner who knew more about the technicalities of English grammar than the peculiarities of national customs. It was more quaint than instructive, but the Pâsha was deeply interested in it, and he was quite disturbed by the imputations that Margaret cast upon the veracity of the author.

‘But, my dear Mademoiselle,’ he remonstrated, ‘everybody knows that the mizzletoe is a well-established custom in your country, and that the ladies, the young and pretty ones, are continually being kissed under it. I think it is a charming custom myself,’ he added with a twinkle in his eyes.

Margaret laughed. ‘It is a custom that has fallen very much into disuse in these days,’ she said. ‘There is no kissing under the mistletoe except in the servants’ hall now. In a mixed company at a party it would certainly not be allowed.’

‘*Bismillah!* what a pity! But I will not believe you; it is impossible that such a custom as that should ever fall into disuse. Now confess, Mademoiselle, have not you yourself often been saluted under this plant?’ Margaret laughed again as she shook her head, and took up the book as a hint that she wished to go on with the reading; but the Pâsha was apparently not in the mood for work to-day, and he took no notice. ‘It is really very sad,’ he said with a reproachful sigh; ‘you should not destroy all my pleasant little illusions about England so remorselessly. Am I to believe, then, that all this that I have been reading in this agreeable little book is changed and modernised now?’

‘Not the weather,’ said Margaret smiling.

‘Ah no, that I know by my own experience. I found myself in London once in November, and I recollect it,—I recollect but too well what it was like.’

‘It is the very worst possible time of the year in which to visit London, and every foreigner that I have met seems to have selected it. I wonder why,’ Margaret observed reflectively.

‘The climate is vile certainly; but there is much that pleases in England, and she has good rulers,’ said the Pâsha. ‘That is the difference between your country and ours. Ours is rotten at the top; yours is rotten at the bottom. Up to the present the seething mischiefs of your democracy have been kept under, but the restraints are slight, and the barriers are being removed every year. The tide must burst through at last, and

then law and order will be swept away, and England may fall into misfortunes as bad as ours.'

Margaret's patriotism was roused. It was all very well to hold pessimistic views as a Conservative ; as an Englishwoman in a foreign country she felt bound to adopt another tone. 'Oh, I don't know about that !' she said. 'There is a good deal of public spirit left in England, and when it becomes a question of anarchy, party politics will be cast aside, and every able man will throw himself into the effort of stemming the mischief with all his might, —and determination and energy, joined to ability, will do much.'

'That is true ; there is much energy in the English character,—I have observed that. Look at them here in Egypt. Why, they have revolutionised the country, and they have made Cairo the gayest place on earth. They race, they dance, they play at their lawn-tennis, and they bicycle, all in one breath ; and still they have energy left to manage the business and fight the battles of the whole world. *Mon Dieu*, what an irrepressible race !'

'You would be glad if they could be repressed a little in this country, wouldn't you ?' asked Margaret mischievously.

'Ah, as to that I refuse to commit myself. If it is to be a choice between English or French rule, however, I think we may be well content to stay as we are. As to the chances of my own unhappy country, they can but grow worse from year to year, so long as,—but it is no good speaking about that.'

The look of habitual melancholy which is

noticeable in the faces of Orientals of the highest class deepened into something like despair in the countenance of the Pâsha whenever he alluded to the affairs of his own country. He was a great Turk and a fine soldier, and as a statesman he would at least have been upright ; but for this very reason he was excluded from any share in the government of his country, and with the spirit of patriotism burning like a strong flame within him, he was compelled to look on from afar in bitter impotence at the spectacle of disintegration and destruction. The deepening of the shadow on his face whenever the fortunes of his country were spoken of betrayed the secret pain and humiliation of a proud man, and Margaret, who guessed a good deal more than he told her of this feeling, could not endure to see it. She reproached herself now for having given the conversation a turn which had led to such a painful subject.

‘ You are very generous in your estimate of my countrymen, Pâsha,’ she said hurriedly ; ‘ I only wish that they were equally unprejudiced and clear-sighted in their judgment of the Turks.’

‘ They are rather hard upon us, certainly,’ said the Pâsha with a tinge of bitterness. ‘ They hear of the atrocities committed by a few bands of lawless Kurds, and they instantly brand us all as barbarians. They sympathise with the Armenians because they are Christians, and they do not know what sort of Christians they are. *You* know, Mademoiselle, and I think you can scarcely wonder at the dislike which they inspire in me.’

‘ No indeed I do not !’ said Margaret warmly.



‘I am ashamed that they should call themselves Christians, and I only wonder that you can trust me, or any one else whom you suppose to belong to the same creed.’

‘It is not because you are a Christian that I trust you, Mademoiselle, but in spite of it, because you are an Englishwoman. We trust the English still, and do not forget how they fought side by side with us,—though they must have forgotten what the men who were once their brothers-in-arms were like when they can speak of us in the terms they do. What was the phrase that I saw the other day?—Oh yes, the unspeakable Turk!’

Margaret coloured hotly. She had heard the phrase so often that it had passed into a commonplace for her; and it was only when she saw how keenly it pierced the heart of a brave man that she realised its force. She looked very much troubled, and made a great effort to change the subject.

‘It is extraordinary what misconceptions prevail in England on Turkish matters,’ she said apologetically. ‘Of course I know nothing about politics, nor how far we are mistaken in that respect, though I suspect that the newspaper men, in their anxiety to create a sensation, have been guilty of all sorts of exaggeration and unfairness; but what astonishes me is that we should have such false impressions about domestic matters. You have no idea, Pâsha, how very different from what I expected everything has been to me.’

‘It does not seem to you then that we are such utter barbarians,’ said the Pasha, beguiled into a smile.

‘On the contrary, I wish that in many respects we were more like you. There will be much that I shall miss when I return to England.’

‘When you return to England? Are you thinking of that, Mademoiselle? Surely you are not thinking of leaving us?’

‘Oh no, I hope not indeed; it is the last thing that I wish. But of course the day will come when you will no longer need my services, and then I should naturally return to England.’

‘You have friends and relations there, no doubt? You intend to make your home there ultimately?’

‘No, not necessarily. I have lost the ties that made England a home to me, and I have no near relations left. No, I have no ties to draw me back to England.’

‘Then, Mademoiselle, I hope that you will consider this your home. At any rate remember that it will be your home for so long as you choose. Of course if you should desire at any time to revisit your native country, to see your friends or to give yourself a change, you must not hesitate to say so, and I shall defray the expenses of it with pleasure. You will naturally wish for a holiday sometimes, and it will be easy to arrange it in the summer when my wife goes to Constantinople, where she has plenty of friends to entertain her. But if you find yourself happy with us, I beg of you to go on living with us, and to look forward to it as a certainty. We are not likely ever to wish to part with you so long as you are contented to stay.’

‘Oh, Excellency, you are really too kind!’ said Margaret, quite overcome by the benevolence of this assurance. ‘I wish I could feel that I deserved it. You make me tremble lest I should ever disappoint you, and forfeit the good opinion that I value so highly.’

‘I do not think you will,’ said the Pâsha with conviction. ‘I have observed your character closely, Mademoiselle, and it is written on your forehead that I may trust you. My wife loves you as a sister, and I have confidence in you. I know that with you Valda is safe. She is young and inexperienced, and she needs guidance sometimes. If she had chosen any one of the ladies of the *harim* for a friend I should never have been able to feel sure that she might not get led into some stupid entanglement. And a friend from outside would be worse,—the wives of some of these Egyptian princes and Pâshas are terribly emancipated, corrupt, even, in secret. One does not know exactly what they are, for if ever a scandal happens it is immediately hushed up; but I do not want Valda to become very intimate with any of them. Praise be to God! she does not seem to have taken a fancy to any one in particular, I think.’ The Pâsha paused, as if he expected to receive some confirmation of his belief; but Margaret was silent under a miserable oppression of conscience that took the pleasure out of his praise. ‘Do you think that there is any one of the ladies who visit here upon whom Valda is inclined to bestow confidence?’ the Pâsha asked as Margaret did not speak.

‘No,—at least, well, yes,—Hamîda Hânem comes here pretty often, and I think Valda is inclined to make friends with her. She is the only one, I think.’

‘Hamîda Hânem? You mean the wife of Mûrad Âli Pâsha?’ said the Pâsha consideringly. ‘Well, I don’t know of anything against her. Mûrad Âli Pâsha is a foolish fellow, a poor weak fop who lets his wife have too much of her own way, they say, but I have never heard any harm of her. I know nothing of her; that is the worst,—one knows so little,—how can one know? But you are a good judge of character, Mademoiselle, and you have had opportunities of observing her,—what do you think of her?’

‘I really have not seen much of her,’ said Margaret, feeling not a little uncomfortable under this cross-examination. ‘She does not seem to me to be very refined in her manners and habits; but, you know, she very seldom talks in French,—it is always Turkish at the dinner-table, and she speaks so quickly that I cannot understand much of what she says.’

‘But you do not like her? Ah, I see you do not. Well, God is great, and that which is predestined will happen; but I hope that my wife will not become too confidential with her. Valda is as simple and innocent as a white dove, but she is very beautiful, and it is written in the pages of the air that great beauty is a snare. She does not dream of it, but she is the most beautiful woman in Cairo; even among the lovely English girls that one sees at the balls here, there are none to compare with her,—at least I think so. Do you

agree with me, or is it that I am blinded by my great love for her?’

The Pâsha was looking at Margaret with a smile in his kind blue eyes, and she felt a sudden, almost intolerable sense of remorse aching at her heart as she thought of all she knew that he did not; but she answered quickly: ‘I think she is the most beautiful woman that I have ever seen. As for English ladies, they are beautiful certainly, some of them, but they do not compare with her. They are different,—they are lovely, she is magnificent. What a sensation she would make if she were to appear in the box of a London theatre in all her diamonds, her own beauty outshining the beauty of her jewels—dear me, Pâsha, how everyone would gaze at her! Every opera-glass in the theatre would be turned upon her——’

‘*Bismillah!* What a day of mud that would be!’ exclaimed the Pâsha, betrayed into a Turkish expression as he seldom was when he spoke French. ‘Do not speak of it, Mademoiselle! And yet these are the risks that English husbands have to run daily and nightly. Allah! I wonder how they can endure it. But it is true that they have more security than we have. We are obliged to exercise precaution; it is impossible to be too careful, and you cannot wonder that we feel it important to keep our women out of the way of temptation. You know that if for any caprice Valda should take a dislike to me, she could come to me to-morrow and demand her papers of divorce, and I could not refuse to give them.’

‘I know,’ said Margaret. ‘It is a state of

things that seems to me to be very wrong ; but the Socialists in England and all over the Continent are trying to bring about something very like it for themselves.'

'Are they? They are fools then, and they will bring troubles without end upon their heads. They will have to shut up their women, or they will never enjoy an instant of peace or security.'

'I don't fancy that they quite contemplate that,' Margaret said drily.

'But it would be necessary,' insisted the Pâsha ; 'I can assure you that it would be necessary. For a little time, perhaps, old ideas might exert a restraining influence ; but that would soon wear off, and then, mixing freely in society as your women do, the consequences would be disastrous. It is bad enough with us, when a woman, if she becomes discontented with her husband, can at least not get another without the help of her parents or relations ; but with our system of seclusion it can be made to work, and it is not without its advantages for both sides. You see the husband can have his mind easy ; there is no occasion for jealousy, and he is obliged to treat his wife well, or else she will not stay with him. I know a man with such a bad temper that he cannot keep a wife for more than three months at a time ; I do not know how many times he has been divorced,—no woman seems able to endure him. But it is a great advantage for a woman to feel that she is not obliged to stay with a man who is cruel or unkind to her, or who bores her even,—do you not see that?'

‘Yes,’ said Margaret, ‘I suppose there are some advantages, and while a woman is young and beautiful it might be all very well; it might be easy for her to find another home; but afterwards,—it is when her youth and beauty are gone that the conditions of such a system would be hard. Then, if her husband wished to have a younger and prettier wife——’

‘Ah, well, of course that is natural,’ said the Pâsha. ‘That does sometimes happen with us,—not very often now though—but when it does, there is nothing for it but resignation. It comes to this, that while she is young the wife has the advantage, afterwards the husband. And it has not worked badly with us, I assure you. My mother was the third wife of my father,—yes, the third, I think, or was she the fourth? I am not sure—but I remember very well that she was on perfectly happy terms with him and with his other wives. In those days polygamy was not so uncommon among us as it is now, and my father’s *harim* was a *harim* as you English people understand the word. But he was a just man, and he was most careful not to infringe the law which enjoins that there shall be perfect equality among the wives. He was fondest of my mother, I know, but the others had quite as many dresses and jewels and slaves, and I do not remember any quarrels.’

‘I think Turkish ladies must be blessed with naturally sweet tempers,’ remarked Margaret, preferring not to enter into an argument on the subject. ‘It surprises me to see how well they get on among themselves; one never hears them

bickering or disputing with each other. If any annoyance does arise, they generally resign themselves to it quite easily, and content themselves with remarking that it is the will of God.'

'What have they got to quarrel about?' demanded the Pâsha. 'They can have no serious grievances, and as for the trifling vexations of everyday life, what is religion good for but to teach resignation?'

Margaret smiled. 'It is a virtue that the Mohammedan religion certainly does tend to inculcate,' she said, and she closed the book that she held in her hand.

The Pasha had not done much reading that morning; but there was no time for any more, for the boom of the gun from the citadel announced the hour of noon, and this was a signal that luncheon must be at hand. A small, bare-footed slave-girl in loose draperies of crimson cotton, tied round her waist with a pink rag, appeared in the doorway to announce it. '*Yemék gêldé*,' she said impassively.

'Ah, your dinner has come, and mine doubtless is waiting, I must go and dress,' said the Pâsha, and gathering the full folds of his dressing-gown about him, he thrust his stockinged feet into the slippers lying on the floor. 'Go, Mademoiselle,' he said, as he retired to his dressing-room, 'and peace go with you. Remember what I have said. If my wife wishes to go about with you I am delighted; I have entire confidence in you.'



## CHAPTER VII

WHEN Margaret joined the party at luncheon, she found Valda and another of the younger ladies leaning back in their chairs in an exhausted state after the fatigues of the bath, which had, they complained, been unbearably hot. The marble chamber they used was always heated to a tremendous extent in the morning, and Margaret generally preferred to wait until the evening, when the walls and floor had had time to cool down a little; but the Turkish ladies seemed to consider that the greater the heat the more thorough the work, and they suffered willingly, though complainingly.

A slave girl stood behind Valda all through the meal, softly rubbing her mistress's hair with a towel; but it was so long and thick that it was a troublesome business to get it dry, and Valda spent most of the afternoon in the garden with it falling about her shoulders. It glittered in the sunshine like threads of burnished gold, and Margaret, who was sitting by looking after Djemâl-ed-Din, could not restrain an expression of admiration.

'Yes,' said Valda with a sigh, 'it does look like gold after it has been washed, but it won't last

long. My mother's was just like this when she was young : she has a lock of it, which she has kept, and it is a deeper gold than mine and more beautiful ; but now, you see, it is quite black. Every year mine is getting more brown and less gold, and soon it will be quite ugly. It vexes me to think of it, but I don't know why it should. It does not really matter in the least ; the Pâsha is the only person to care, and he is easily satisfied.'

Valda was in a melancholy mood that afternoon, and nothing that Margaret could say availed to cheer her. In the evening, after Djemâl-ed-Din had been put to bed and to sleep (a work always of much difficulty), she asked Margaret to come and talk to her and the Pâsha in their sitting-room. It was Margaret's custom to look in upon them to say good-night, and they had fallen into the habit of asking her to draw a chair up to their two sofas for a little talk. Valda generally took little part in these conversations, and rarely interposed except to put in a suggestion or ask for an explanation ; but to-night it was she, and not Margaret, who talked. Her mood of the afternoon had changed strangely, and had given place to a state of suppressed excitement that made her hardly mistress of herself.

She listened impatiently to an account that the Pâsha gave of a ball at Ghesireh to which he had been the night before. He did not dance, but he enjoyed going to European parties where he was introduced to charming English ladies, and he liked to tell his wife all about them afterwards. He seemed to have enjoyed this ball especially, and he

was very full of it ; but Valda listened without sympathy, and at last she interrupted him with a vehement remonstrance.

‘Why do you tell us all this, Pâsha? Mademoiselle knows it, and I don’t want to know it. You go and amuse yourself with these English ladies,—you sit in these little cosy nooks that you describe,—you converse,—you exchange compliments, *mon Dieu!* and you enjoy it very much. I quite believe you ; but you do not consider how annoying it is to me, who have to stay cooped up at home to listen to your tales.’

The Pâsha glanced at her in astonishment, and then he chuckled softly. ‘You are jealous of these English ladies, Valda, I do believe,’ he said, looking highly delighted.

‘Not at all!’ Valda protested energetically. ‘Do not flatter yourself. The person of whom I am jealous is *you*. Why should you be free to go out and enjoy yourself with the ladies of all nations, while I am not? It is villanously unfair!’

‘My dear Valda, you see quite as much of the ladies as I do,’ said the Pâsha, pretending to misunderstand her. ‘Ladies of all nations come to call upon you, and I know that it is simply for your sake that they are amiable to me. Only last night two of them asked my permission to come and make your acquaintance. By the way,—I ought to have told you—I said you would be pleased, and they are coming to call some day this week.’

‘I do not want them!’ said Valda vehemently. ‘I see enough women, and I am tired of them.’

You know that these parties of yours would be very dull if you met only men there. If you know the ladies and amuse yourself with them, why should not I make the acquaintance of the gentlemen? It is monstrous that such an inequality should exist! Don't you think so, Mademoiselle?'

Margaret was dumb with surprise. She had often heard Valda murmur against the restrictions upon her sex; but her remarks had always been tempered by a spirit of fatalism that had made her accept them as irremediable; this open mutiny was a new thing. But not less surprising than Valda's outburst was the Pâsha's manner of taking it. Margaret would have expected him to look excessively annoyed, but she saw that he merely smiled with quiet amusement.

'What would you do, Valda, if I were to take you at your word, and let you come with me to one of these parties?' he asked jestingly. 'Should you know how to make conversation with one strange man after another?' I don't think you would. I think when it came to the point, your irresistible impulse would be to cover up your face and scream to them all to keep away.'

'Of course, I should,' said Valda with quivering lips. 'I know that I should behave like a fool; but it is what I have been brought up to be, and it is not my fault. Any reform in this direction will come too late for me; but does that alter the cruelty and injustice of the system?'

Valda sat upright among her cushions, trying to control the emotion into which she had been

betrayed ; but her eyes were full of tears, and as she finished speaking, her voice broke, and the heavy drops rolled silently down her face.

The Pâsha sprang from his sofa in surprise and dismay, and flung himself on his knees at her side. 'Valda, my dear Valda, what have I done, what have I said to hurt you?' he asked in rapid Turkish. 'Tell me, Yıldiz, my star, my delight, what can I do for you? You know that your wish is my wish, and there is nothing that I can refuse you. What is your desire?'

Valda could not tell him. She had dashed away her tears, and was making desperate efforts to regain her composure ; but shaken by a storm of agonised weeping, she turned herself away from the Pâsha and buried her face in the cushions. His arm was round her, and he could feel the violence of her sobs, as he looked up at Margaret with distress and anxiety in his kind face. 'What is the matter, Mademoiselle?' he asked pressingly. 'Do you know of any reason for this?'

He had often known Valda shed tears. She had her melancholy moods, and he had more than once found her crying for no reason that he could discover ; but never since the night of his wedding, which he looked back upon even now with a pang, had he seen her in such an agony of distress and self-abandonment as this. He had felt then that all his hopes of happiness hung in the balance. The beautiful young wife whom he had never seen had taken his heart captive from the moment of suspense when, on lifting her veil, he had been

dazzled by the vision of overwhelming beauty that met his gaze, and to find his prize shrinking from him, and fainting in his arms, had been a severe disappointment. When she had come to her senses she had fallen into just such a storm of weeping as this, and he had feared that she would never be reconciled to the fate which had given her to him as a wife. It had been a great shock to him, and the remembrance of it returned to him now with a miserable misgiving, as he bent over her and vainly tried to calm her agitation. Yet if there were any tragedy in her life, Made-moiselle must surely know of it.

‘What do you think can be the matter?’ he asked again, as Margaret kept silence; but before she could answer, Valda raised her head from the cushions and spoke for herself.

‘There is nothing the matter,’ she said, trying to force a smile. ‘I am not very well, and that is why I am behaving so foolishly. It is all nonsense about injustice and cruelty, and you must not regard it. I shall be better directly; only let me alone for a moment or two, Pâsha-jim,—if you would leave me *quite* alone——’

Her voice failed her again, and she hid her face in her hands once more; but the violence of her passion was past, and her sobs began to subside. The Pâsha waited patiently, making no further attempts to soothe her.

Presently she sat up and smoothed the disordered curls upon her forehead. ‘I have been very foolish and unreasonable,’ she said penitently. ‘Really, I do not know what has made me so silly,

unless it is the hot weather lately that has been too much for me. But I will not begin again.'

'Is there anything that makes you unhappy, Valda?' asked her husband. 'Is there anything you want that I can get for you?'

'No, Pâsha dear, no,' Valda said with a little sigh. She looked at him wistfully for a moment, and then, with a gesture of appeal that was exceedingly winning, she held out her hand, and laid it upon his. 'You are very good to me, Pâsha-jim. Nobody could have a kinder husband, and I am much more fortunate than a great many ladies of Frangistan. Mademoiselle is always telling me so, are you not, Mademoiselle? Do you not think that he is a very good husband?' she added smiling, as the Pâsha, after folding her delicate hand for a moment between his own, bent his head, and pressed his lips upon it.

Margaret was an exceedingly reserved person, and Valda noticed with amusement the deepening of the colour in her cheeks as she looked on at this scene; but the simple-minded Pâsha was absolutely unconscious that there was anything awkward in the situation, and his whole attention was given up to the task of cheering and consoling Valda. 'You must go out more, my dear child,' he said with solicitude. 'I am sure that it is staying so much in the house that affects your spirits; and sitting about the garden is not a sufficient change for you. Why didn't you have the carriage out this afternoon, and go for a drive with Mademoiselle? You enjoyed it yesterday, didn't you?'

'Yes, Effen', said Valda quietly.

‘And Mademoiselle enjoyed it too, didn’t you, Mademoiselle? Well, you should go out every afternoon, and in the morning whenever you can, and drive out a good way. Don’t be content with merely the Ghesireh round, or a turn through Esbêkiah; drive out a good way to Ghiseh or Matariyeh, and then, when you come to a quiet place, you can get out and walk with Mademoiselle,—that will do you good.’

‘Yes, but you forget, Pâsha, my time is so much taken up. There are so many calls to make, so many visitors to receive, and my mother wants me continually. It is impossible for me to go out like that, except very occasionally.’

‘Oh, never mind the visitors; they can be told that you are out, I suppose? I cannot have your health and spirits sacrificed to a pack of chattering women whom it doesn’t give you the least pleasure to see.’

‘They nearly always send word beforehand that they are coming, and I cannot refuse to stay in, or avoid returning their visits,’ said Valda with a touch of petulancy. ‘Here are these English ladies who have invited themselves for this week,—I suppose you wish me to see them?’

‘Well, I suppose you must; but they won’t stay long, and you can go out in the morning, or after they have left, can’t you? I thought it would enliven you to see these ladies. One of them is an American, a very lively and amusing young girl, most droll in her ways. But if it worries you I won’t let them come any more.’



‘Oh, it doesn’t worry me, I assure you,’ said Valda quickly. ‘On the contrary, it is an amusement to me; as much amusement as I ever get.’

‘What amusement do you wish for, Valda?’ asked the Pâsha gently. ‘Only tell me what you want, and if money or trouble can get it, I will give it you.’

‘But you do; you give me everything that you can, Pâsha-jim,’ said Valda, melting again.

‘You would not like to go about unveiled, or to do anything contrary to the customs of our religion?’

‘Allah forbid!’ she answered hastily. ‘No indeed! I could never look my mother in the face again,—and all my friends in Constantinople—how could I ever face them if they had such a scandal against me?’

‘And you are not really pining to make acquaintance with all the men of the European community here? Oh, Valda, if you could know what scoundrels some of them are——’

‘Yes, yes, I believe it, and I don’t want to know them at all. Why, Pâsha, you know that it is impossible, and it is only my crossness that makes me ever think of such a thing. *You* know what a horror I have of being seen by any man, don’t you, Mademoiselle?’

Margaret smiled. She was taking very little part in the conversation this evening; but some instinct told her that Valda was glad of her presence, so she stayed on, though it was getting very late.

‘You have indeed,’ she said. ‘It was the first surprise of my arrival to see you duck down, and hide your face behind little Djemâl-ed-Din’s skirts, when I entered your house at Constantinople with the porter behind me carrying my luggage. I think it amounts to a mania with you, Hânem.’

The Pâsha looked well pleased. ‘Well, as it happens, that is fortunate for her. It would be very difficult for a Turkish lady of my wife’s rank to break through our custom in that respect. She could not do it and keep her good name; and that I know Valda would not be prepared to forfeit.’

‘No indeed, never!’ said Valda vehemently. ‘Sooner would I tie a stone round my neck and throw myself into the Nile.’

‘Well, I hope you will never be reduced to such a desperate alternative as that,’ remarked the Pâsha smiling; ‘but I don’t want you to die of *ennui* either, and as you seem for the moment to be a little surfeited with the society of your own sex I must find you some other amusement. What do you say to my taking a box at the opera for you? There is a very good French company playing this winter, and there you can see a good deal without being seen.’

‘But how can Madame avoid being seen at a box at the opera?’ asked Margaret as Valda was silent.

‘Oh, there are special boxes for the Turkish ladies; all those on the right hand side of the theatre in the second tier have got wire *grilles* that you can see through quite well, but which

effectually prevent anyone behind them from being visible. You have never been, Mademoiselle? Well, you must go with my wife; you will be the best possible chaperon for her.'

'It is very kind of you, Pâsha,' said Valda doubtfully, 'but it will be a considerable expense, I am afraid, and I don't know that for me it will be worth it. I went several times with Nâzla Hânem last winter, and I don't think I enjoyed it much. The actors spoke so quickly, and I could not understand what it was all about.'

'Yes, but you did not know French then nearly as well as you do now, and Nâzla Hânem is so stupid; she doesn't understand a word, so she could not explain to you. But with Mademoiselle, you will see, it will be very different. I am sure you will both enjoy it very much, and in the evening there can be nothing to prevent your going out. I will see about it at once.'

Margaret took up that day's number of *The Egyptian Gazette* to see what plays were going on, and the Pâsha entered into an enthusiastic description of one that he had seen, called 'La Marraine de Sharrlie' which turned out to be 'Charley's Aunt' in French garb. The funny scenes in it that he and Margaret recalled, and their laughter over them, amused Valda, and the Pâsha's delight in her recovered spirits, and the devotion with which he watched her, were touching to witness.

It was nearly midnight when Margaret at last rose to go, and Valda uttered an exclamation of concern as she noticed the time. 'I had no idea

that it was so late,' she said, 'and I am afraid it will be very cold and dark for you to cross the garden to get to your room. I will send a slave to attend you, and she can carry a lantern. Have you got a warm wrap to put on?'

'Hadn't you better go through the *selâmlek*?' suggested the Pâsha. 'The corridor runs all round the square the whole way to your room, and that will save you from having to go out at all. I will lend you my keys with pleasure, if you care to accept them.'

He spoke laughingly, and Valda looked at Margaret with a smile, as if she did not expect her to take the offer seriously. But Margaret had caught a chill more than once through going out into the night air in this way, and was glad of any chance to escape the risk of it.

'Is there really any reason why I should not go that way?' she asked inquiringly. 'Of course I should not like to do anything rash, but I suppose the gentlemen would be all safely shut into their rooms, and if I did happen to meet one of them he would not say anything to me——'

'Of course he would not,' said the Pâsha laughing. 'You can perfectly well go, and you are not likely to meet anyone at such a late hour as this. It is only the bedrooms of the *selâmlek* that are in that wing, and their occupants will all be locked in and asleep. They might be rather astonished at seeing a lady passing through if they were about; but I will explain to them, so that you can always go and come that way. It will be convenient for you if the weather should be bad, or if you have a

cold. I will get duplicate keys made for you, and in the meantime here are mine, to which you are very welcome.' He took them up from the writing-table, where they were lying with his watch and chain and other things out of his pocket. 'This,' he said, as he handed them to Margaret, 'this little key opens the door at this end; that larger one opens into the unused hall on the other side of the square; and this third one, with curious wards, will let you through out of that into the corridor which leads past your room and those of the other ladies. You are very safely locked off from the men, you see!'

'*Bonne aventure*, Mademoiselle!' Valda called out, as Margaret was departing, and looking back, she saw a mischievous gleam of laughter in her lovely eyes. She only smiled back, and went out into the wide corridor, which ran like an immense antechamber all the length of the south wing; but before she had taken many steps the Pâsha came hastening after her. 'You are not afraid, Mademoiselle? You would not like me to come with you?'

'Oh no, thank you, Pâsha, I am not in the least afraid. Why should I be?'

'Well, you must have a candle at any rate. It is all dark in there. I intend to have the electric light all over the palace before long, but I cannot get the men to come, and at present it is all in darkness. Here, take this candle of mine that I always use. You can bring it back in the morning.' An old-fashioned silver candlestick with a long wax candle in it was standing on a table in

the hall, and he took it up and lighted it for her. 'You are quite sure that you do not feel nervous? Ah! you English people—you have no nerves—well then, *bon soir!*' And handing her the candle with a courteous inclination, he turned back to rejoin Valda.

Margaret went on her way smiling a little. The Pâsha's beautiful manners contrasted rather strangely with the Oriental carelessness of his attire. His first act when he entered the *harîm* invariably was to discard the light tweed suit that he wore out of doors and invest himself in a flowing dressing-gown of purple silk; and this, with his crimson *tarbûsh*, and the flapping yellow slippers without heels that he loved, made him look very Oriental indeed. Without his fez, or a night-cap, Margaret had never seen him,—he had explained to her that Turkish etiquette with regard to the covering and uncovering of the head is in exact opposition to English customs—and she was by this time so used to his appearance within doors that she hardly noticed it. Sometimes, however, she was struck by its picturesqueness, and she could not help smiling to herself as she recalled his appearance in the scene she had just witnessed; yet she had been more touched than amused, and the smile faded from her face as she thought of it. She was still musing over it when she passed the garden-stairs and came to the little door above, leading into the *selâmlek*.

The palace was very inconveniently and wastefully built in the form of a great rectangular parallelogram, with a break between the south wing and

the main block of the building, where the reception rooms both of the *selâmlek* and the *harîm* were. From Valda's rooms, therefore, it was necessary either to cross the garden, or to go through the corridor running through the west block of the palace.

Margaret had never been into this part of the *selâmlek* before, and when the latched door clicked behind her, and she found herself alone in the gloom of the far-stretching corridor, she felt for a moment a little uncomfortable.

To the left of the corridor were some unused rooms looking on to the garden of the *harîm*, and these were always kept jealously locked, as she knew ; but on the right was a long line of doors belonging to the bedrooms of the friends, relations, and dependents of the Pâsha, strict Turks every one of them. The doors were all closed, and there was not a glimmer of light to be seen under them. The corridor was perfectly quiet and deserted ; but the air felt heavy and close like that of some vault never entered by living humanity, and Margaret felt her heart beginning to beat uncomfortably fast. She felt inclined to turn back, and go downstairs across the garden as usual rather than run the gauntlet of all those closed doors ; but her own self-respect, as well as the thought of what she would have to say to the Pâsha in the morning, prevented her from doing this, and she resolved to make a run for it. She flew swiftly and noiselessly along the narrow strip of carpet that ran along the middle of the wide passage, and never stopped until she had locked herself into the unused

vestibule at the end. Then she went on more leisurely ; and laughing at herself for her groundless fears, eventually reached her own room without misadventure. ' I shall not be so nervous another time,' she thought.



## CHAPTER VIII

IT was Christmas Day,—Christmas Day in the City of Sunshine ; and palace and mosque, street and garden,—the houses with their mysterious latticed windows jutting from settings of slender marble columns, and the crimson poinsettias and tall palms overtopping the jealously guarded grounds of the Pâshas,—all were steeped in the intense splendour of the Egyptian sunlight. The wide streets of the Esbêkiah quarter of the city were thrown into flickering shade by their long avenues of spreading acacias ; but in every direction some long straight road branched off to the outskirts, disclosing a fresh vista of misty beauty,—a white-domed mosque shining golden in the purple distance, or a single slender palm-tree outlined against a narrow strip of blue sky.

A morning walk through the streets of Cairo, before the white heat of the day has begun, while the air is still fresh and the colours still vivid, is an enchanting and exhilarating experience ; and Margaret, who was on her way to the early celebration at the English church, walked as if on air through the quiet streets that were so much pleasanter now than they would be later on, when

the throng of carriages and fashionable folk would begin to flow through them. She had taken a holiday for the day, and after the early service she breakfasted with some English friends who lived in the Teufikieh quarter, not far from the English church, and took her way with them to the morning service at eleven o'clock.

The church was always crowded at this service by a fashionable congregation composed of the English and American residents and visitors, and to-day it was full to overflowing. The indefatigable orderlies, whose business it was to show strangers to the unreserved places in the side aisles, were at their wits' end to know how to dispose of all the applicants for places, and Margaret found herself separated from her friends and packed away among some very smart people in one of the front rows of reserved seats. The service had begun, and the church was filled with the triumphant notes of the organ rising above the voices of the choir in our English Song of Victory, the *Te Deum*. In that sub-tropical climate, with every window in the church thrown open to mitigate the heat, and with palm-branches and exotics for decorations, there was little to recall the associations of the festival ; but the service was the same as that which was going up from thousands of holly-decked churches in the mother-country far away, and Margaret was soon absorbed in the spirit of it. The chancel was beautiful with masses of white and crimson flowers, tall, slender arum lilies, and blood-red hibiscus, while every arch was outlined with long, slender palm-branches more graceful than any flamboyant

moulding. What attention Margaret had to spare from the service was taken up by all this loveliness. She did not notice the people round her, and she did not know that she was sitting next to a person whom she had cause to remember.

He was a tall man, young and of distinguished bearing, with regular and commanding features as unmistakably English as were his blue eyes and fair hair. He was dressed in plain clothes to-day, instead of the splendid Khedivial uniform in which Margaret had first seen him ; but if she had happened to glance at his face she could not have mistaken him ; he was Djemâl-ed-Din's hero.

This stately personage was not likely to bestow much attention upon a neighbour like Margaret Grey. He could scarcely avoid noticing her late and unwelcome intrusion ; but in the neat little figure dressed with unpretending sobriety in Quaker gray, it was impossible that he should recognise the English-speaking Turkish lady whom he had seen at Ghesireh, and he did not bestow a second glance upon her. Her entrance was unwelcome, because, in an overcrowded church, with the thermometer at 86° in the shade, a vacant space beside one is more to be desired than much beauty and many diamonds, and this girl had neither diamonds nor beauty. Her appearance was eminently respectable ; but that was a branding epithet in the society to which he belonged. To be disreputable might not be precisely an object of ambition, but to forego all pretensions to style so far as to incur the accusation of respectability was to place oneself outside the pale.

Djemâl-ed-Din's hero had, in virtue of his friendship with a member of the British Agency, a right to occupy a seat very seldom wanted by its actual owner, and he was to be seen there Sunday after Sunday with a regularity that did credit to his training. In reality there was not a scrap of credit due to him, from the religious point of view at least. He came to church for the sake of a quiet time to himself in the midst of pleasant surroundings ; and he liked to look at pretty faces and shining coils of hair, at remarkable hats and silks and satins, with the scent of flowers and the charm of music in the air. He looked very reverent and devout, but he did not take in one word of the service, and the satisfaction which it afforded him was purely sensuous and æsthetic. There was one decidedly pretty girl with a mass of fair and fluffy hair, and a piquant little profile under an immense hat piled up with all the flowers of the greenhouse, of whom an excellent view was obtainable from his seat ; and though his admiration was of a cool and critical nature, she was an attraction counting for something in the mixed motives that drew him so regularly to his place. But to-day he scarcely glanced in her direction. She was looking particularly fetching (as she herself would have termed it) in a dress of creamy white, with astonishing butterfly erections of lace and beads on her shoulders, and her hat, which was a more daring combination of colour than the smartest of all the gay flower-gardens around her, seemed to cry out to be looked at ; but all her smartness and all her prettiness were to-day eclipsed

in the mind of the person for whose benefit they were principally intended ; they were eclipsed by a memory.

It was strange that, sitting next to Margaret and never once heeding her, there should be a man who was thinking of her all through the service,—of her, and of that other Turkish lady whose wonderful beauty was like the splendour of the sun, so dazzling that to the eyes who had gazed upon it lesser lights must suffer eclipse.

It had been but for a few moments that he had seen that face ; but the impression of it had been so deeply printed upon his mind that it was as vividly present to him now as it had been in the moment when he had galloped away. Since then he had thought of nothing but that face and those eyes, and he had wished to think of nothing else. The incident had made an extraordinary impression upon him ; and even if it had not been so remarkable in itself, it had left him with a souvenir that would have effectually served to prevent him from forgetting it. He rode straight home from Ghesireh that afternoon without stopping to speak to any one, and he was standing in the middle of the dusty splendour of his rooms at the 'Abdin Palace in an inexplicable turmoil of spirit, when, chancing to take his handkerchief out of his pocket, he saw something fall to the ground with a dazzling flash of light. He picked it up,—a magnificent diamond star of strange and beautiful design, a constellation of starry stones that flashed and glittered with all the colours of the rainbow. Where did it come from, what did it mean ? He knew, of

course, as soon as the first moment of bewilderment was over, that it must somehow have come to him from the child he had held in his arms ; but that the circumstance had not been accidental did not occur to him. He could not explain it, but the fact remained, and the evidence of it was in his hand, sparkling, flashing, very real and tangible.

He stared at it as if stupefied for some moments, and then the recognition of the value it had for him leaped suddenly into his mind. It was a link that would serve to bring him once more into the radius of the light which had shone so suddenly and so blindingly across his path. An object of such value as this must unquestionably be restored to its owner, and it was his paramount duty to seek her out with that purpose. Thus, what would otherwise have been a meaningless episode, a mere passing of ships in the night, might lead to,—what? He did not pause to let himself think. He only knew that he wanted to see that beautiful face again ; his whole soul was concentrated in the desire to see it, and to know the charming personality that must exist behind it ; and beyond that he did not look. How was he to accomplish this purpose? In what way, by whose means? And then he remembered the other lady, the lady who had spoken to him with an accent so strangely at variance with her appearance. She was an Englishwoman,—of that he was convinced ; no native inmate of a Turkish *harim* could have spoken in a moment of urgency like that, in such a tone, with such an accent. She was a governess or companion,

and the lady with her must be the daughter or wife of some rich Pâsha. This was a clue ; which of the Pâshas in Cairo had an English governess ? There were several, no doubt, but which of them had also so splendid an equipage ? It ought not to be difficult to find out, he thought ; but all through the week he had been inquiring in vain. He was obliged to be so guarded in his questions that he had gained very little information, and he was completely at a loss. He was thinking over the different governesses of whom he had heard, and all the time he was sitting next to the person whom he sought.

The sermon was over,—a thoughtful and powerful sermon which had arrested and held the attention of the crowded church ; and the white-haired priest, in his white robes, in the carved pulpit decorated with white flowers, stood looking over the packed array of smart hats and bonnets and brilliant uniforms below. He stood silent, and looked at them with tired blue eyes that had seen sorrow, and he was perhaps thinking sadly that many of the ears upon which his words had fallen were deaf to their message. He was a man who had read widely and thought deeply upon the burning questions of the day, and he shirked none of them in his sermons. He preached with the learning of a scholar and the knowledge of a man of the world, and the subjects that he chose were such as really affected the hearts and lives of his hearers. There were many more men in this congregation than are usually to be seen breaking the monotony of feminine frippery in such a

gathering, and the church was a real centre of help and inspiration to many people who, in the strange surroundings of a foreign land, might without it have drifted far away from the influences of Christianity.

The sermon over, the people stood up to sing, but Margaret sat for a moment lost in thoughts inspired by the preacher's remarks on the subject of Islam ; and it was then for the first time that she caught sight of the features of her neighbour on the right. The lady on her other side had attracted her attention long ago,—a restless arm bearing a gold bangle, with a diamond flashing in the centre, had taken care of that—but the tall Englishman was so high above her and so close that, even if she had been inclined to look about, she could scarcely have glanced at him without attracting his attention. But as he stood up for the hymn, and she remained for a moment seated, she caught sight of his face, and was at once and effectually roused out of her abstraction.

She stood up beside him, holding her hymn-book with a shaking hand, and finding no voice to join in the singing. Who was he, where did he come from, and how was she to keep out of his way? But a few minutes' consideration convinced her that, though she could not mistake him, it was impossible that he should be able to recognise her, and her nerves steadied themselves by degrees. She carefully refrained from glancing at him again, and when the service was over she waited until he had gone out before leaving her seat. Anxiety has sometimes, however, a fatal tendency to defeat its



own ends, and the very precautions that Margaret took were the means of bringing upon her the attention she was so anxious to avoid.

She lingered until the second service had almost begun, and then, as she did not want to stay for that, she went out rather hurriedly, almost running into the arms of a man coming round the pillar—the very person whose notice she dreaded. He was retracing his steps to fetch his hymn-book, which he had left behind, and the expression of her eyes as their glance met his could not fail to strike him. Where had he seen those eyes before, that look of shrinking surprise and dread? Why did it seem familiar to him? He was roused to a vague consciousness that somewhere or other he must have met this girl; but he could not remember where, and with a gesture of apology that she did not wait to see, he went forward on his errand. Then, as he stooped to pick up his book, still puzzling over her strange look and manner, recollection flashed suddenly upon him. Those English eyes that he had seen between the folds of the *yâshmâk* on the deserted causeway of the Ghesireh drive—the same bright and piercing gray eyes—the same expression of alarm and resolution—it was she! She was the English governess in the household of some rich Pâsha—dress, manner, appearance, everything pointed to it; and she was the very person he was looking for. He must see and identify her, and if possible speak to her; and with that end in view he hurried out of church. The little lady in gray had been swallowed up in the crowds that streamed down the aisle, but she

could not have got out yet, and he waited in the porch, scanning every person who went past. He did not see her, and for a very good reason. Margaret had left the church by a side-door, and she was standing waiting for her friends among the roses and hibiscus on the other side. When they joined her she went home with them by the nearest way, which was by the garden-path that led past the Church House into the Rue Madabêri ; and thus the tall Englishman who was keeping watch over the other entrance waited in vain.

‘Never mind,’ he said to himself, when he saw that he had missed his opportunity ; ‘I noticed her so particularly that I shall be able to describe her, and it will be odd if I don’t find out all about her in a very short time. Now that I have my clue I know where to go for information, and I will lose no time about it.’

## CHAPTER IX

MARGARET spent Christmas Day with her friends, delightful people, unfailingly kind and hospitable, who knew everybody and went everywhere, and it occurred to her that she could easily find out from them what she wanted to know about her neighbour in church. At dessert, after the time-honoured English Christmas dinner of roast beef, plum-pudding, and mince pies, she sat revelling in the pleasant sense of contrast with the conditions of her everyday life, and as she listened to the sparkling talk about Cairo celebrities going on around her, she felt inclined to introduce the subject that filled her mind. But she did not do it ; there was the chance that her inquiries might implicate Valda, and after all, what did it matter who or what he was ? Her only motive for wishing to know was to satisfy her own curiosity, and it was better to run no risk that could be avoided ; so she decided to keep silence.

It was late in the evening when she returned to the palace—late, that is, for her, for the great gates leading into the outer garden of the *harim* were closed after nine o'clock, and unless she had made special arrangements with the slaves through Valda Hânem, as on the rare occasions when she went out to dinner, Margaret always made a point of being

back before dark. This evening, however, the long lines of lamps in the streets were all lighted, and when Margaret came in sight of the great archway in the colonnaded building surrounding the outer court of the palace, it wanted very few minutes to the time of grace. As she passed under the hanging lamp that flared in the archway, the *bowâb*, or porter, who sat on a chair in the entrance all day long, darted out of the little den in the wall, where, in the evening, he lurked like a spider in its hole, and presented Margaret with a letter which he picked up from a slab of stone in the wall.

‘A letter for Mademoiselle!’ he said in Arabic, the white teeth in his picturesque brown face flashing out into a broad smile of congratulation as he saluted to give it her. ‘It has just come, and it was brought by a *syce* from the palace ’Abdin—a very grand *syce*!’

Margaret took the letter, only partially comprehending what the man said, but she saw a keen look in his eyes as he watched her, and she regretted the start into which she had been betrayed as she glanced at the envelopè. It was addressed to *Mademoiselle l’Institutrice Anglaise*, with the name of the palace underneath, and the direction was in a handwriting that she had never seen before. Margaret guessed instantly whence it came, and she would not open it until she was safe in the privacy of her own room. She had to see that Djemâl-ed-Din was safely in bed first, and after that, Valda, who was sitting with the Pâsha, detained her for a while; but at last she was able to turn the key upon herself in her own room, and to open the letter. It ran as follows:—

PALAIS KHEDEVIALE 'ABDIN, CAIRO,  
*December 25.*

Captain Fitzroy presents his compliments to Miss Grey, who must, he thinks, be one of the two ladies who were walking in *yâshmâk* in the Ghesireh drive on the afternoon of Friday last. A valuable ornament was lost upon that occasion, and Captain Fitzroy, who found it, has been making inquiries with a view to restoring it to its owner. If he is right in his conjecture he will be glad to hear from Miss Grey, and will meet her to-morrow or next day at any place that she likes to appoint.

That was all, and there seemed nothing very startling in the concise and guarded words of the note ; yet it cost Margaret a sleepless night, and when the morning came she was still in doubt as to the best course for her to take. If only it were possible to put the letter in the Pâsha's hands, explaining everything to him and leaving him to settle the matter, then all would be safe and satisfactory ; but in the face of Valda's express prohibition Margaret felt that she had no right to do this. It seemed as if it were impossible to be loyal to them both, and she thought of taking the whole responsibility upon herself, and telling Valda nothing until she had sent the English officer about his business, and could return the jewel with the news. This on the whole seemed to her the safest course and the best for Valda's interests ; but to herself it might be worse than unpleasant. To make an appointment with an absolute stranger without the knowledge of her employers seemed to her like

a kind of intrigue, and she shrank from the thought of the dangers and misunderstandings in which she might find herself involved. If the Pâsha were ever by any chance to come upon a clue, he would follow it out to the bitter end; and Margaret had not lived so long in a Turkish household without realising what a terrible thing suspicion is when it has once entered the Eastern mind. She shuddered at the thought of exposing herself to its workings, and told herself that to try to manage the affair upon her own account would be madness; yet some instinct told her also that to speak to Valda about it, to show her the letter, and thus re-awaken in her the unwholesome excitement that was now dying out for want of sustenance, was an expedient which might lead to a serious calamity. Something must be done; the letter she had received must be answered; and while she hesitated, circumstance, as it so often does, stepped in and took the decision out of her hands.

Margaret made her appearance next morning with heavy eyes and pale looks, and Valda, who came out to sit with her under the mandalines in the garden, in the expectation of hearing a lively account of her doings in the town on the previous day, was sorely disappointed by her friend's languid manner and desultory talk. Valda liked to hear any little bit of gossip that could be picked up by anyone going into the town, and in the gay doings of the English community she took an especially keen interest. Human nature is much the same all the world over. In Turkish *harim* or London

drawing-room, in all times and places, from the old Ephesians who cried to Diana, down to the British socialist who reads his *Daily Chronicle*—everywhere we find the same men and women walking the earth and delighting to hear or tell some new thing.

Margaret did her best to satisfy the demands made upon her, but she was not in the mood for story-telling, and her accounts lacked spirit. Valda's attention wandered, and silence fell between them. Margaret's thoughts went back to the subject that had been occupying her mind all the time that she had been trying to talk, and her companion also fell into a reverie. Perhaps some wave of thought found its way from the one brain to the other, for when Valda next spoke it was about the very person of whom Margaret was thinking.

'Mademoiselle,' she said suddenly, 'you see a great many people when you go out into the town. Do you think that you will ever be likely to meet that officer—that good Englishman who saved the life of my little Djemâl-ed-Din? Have you ever heard anything about him?' Margaret started, and could not prevent herself from changing colour under the wistful gaze of the great brown eyes. She hesitated for a moment, uncertain what to say, and Valda, seeing her confusion, guessed in an instant what it meant. 'Mademoiselle,' she exclaimed, sitting up on her cushions with a strangely altered expression, 'you have seen him—you know something! I see you do! Tell me—oh, tell me directly! what has he said to you?'

'He has said nothing to me—at least, he has

never spoken to me,' said Margaret, checking herself suddenly as she thought of the letter.

'Did you see him yesterday?'

'Yes,' said Margaret unwillingly.

'Oh, Mademoiselle, and you were going to keep it back from me! All the other tiresome people that I care nothing about you have told me of, and all the time there was this—but where did you see him—what happened? Tell me all about it.'

'It was only in church. I happened to sit next to him, and it was not until the very end of the service that I saw him. Of course he did not notice me at all; he could not possibly have recognised me.'

'And is that all? Oh, Mademoiselle, I know it is not. You are still keeping something back from me. There is something else, and it is that which is making you so silent and grave and unlike yourself this morning. You must have heard from him—you have got a letter.'

Valda had extraordinary powers of intuition, and Margaret, knowing that her quick intelligence was not to be evaded, gave up the attempt. She glanced at Djemâl-ed-Din, who had an inconvenient habit of wishing to annex for scribbling purposes of his own every scrap of notepaper that came under his observation, and, seeing him safely engaged with the little slaves who were endeavouring to catch blue butterflies under his directions, she drew the letter out of her pocket. 'I got it last night,' she said, 'and I have been tormenting myself about it ever since. I did not want you to be troubled, but now that you have guessed——'



‘Read it,’ said Valda, with shining eyes; ‘let me hear what he says. Oh, it is in English—then translate it.’

Margaret complied, translating into French as she went along, and Valda listened with parted lips. ‘You have read it all, every word?’ she said, when Margaret had done; and only partially satisfied by the assurance that she received, she took the letter into her own hands, and turned over the page as if she would fain have read it for herself.

‘*C’est son écriture,*’ she murmured half to herself. ‘*N’est-ce pas qu’elle est belle !*’ then looking up, ‘What do you think, Mademoiselle—you who can read the dispositions of all the world from their handwritings—what do you say of the character of this gentleman?’

Margaret had formed her conclusions before. She had a strange instinct that seemed to go beyond the set rules of a quasi-science, and in that bold and flowing hand with large capitals, flying upward dashes, and ominously thick down-strokes, she had seen characteristics which were to her the signs manual of a very remarkable and redoubtable personality. Pride and passion, generosity and impulsiveness, combined with indomitable and reckless daring, were all strangely held in check by an iron strength of will and intense reserve, and the handwriting was one which would have arrested the attention of any professed expert. Margaret had examined it with considerable misgivings, but she had no desire to foster the interest that had been aroused in Valda, and she therefore kept her observations discreetly to herself.

‘You see he wishes to arrange a meeting somewhere, that he may restore the star,’ she said, reverting to the subject of the letter.

‘Yes, you must meet him,’ answered Valda thoughtfully; ‘but where? The Pâsha must not know it.’

‘Oh, Hânem, if you would only take my advice! If you would be perfectly frank with the Pâsha about it!’ said Margaret, determined to make one more appeal. ‘Do let me persuade you! Put the matter into His Excellency’s hands at once; tell him simply how it all happened, and let him settle it. He will believe us, and if he is a little annoyed about it at first, it will be better to face that than run the risk of the complications that may follow if we go on with this secrecy.’

‘What complications?’ asked Valda, with a sudden lightning in her eyes. ‘What are you afraid of, Mademoiselle, that you should speak to me like this? You know what barriers hem me in on every side, and my own sense of honour is a better defence to me than any barrier. The Pâsha trusts me, and so may you. I shall never do anything that could possibly bring disgrace on him or on myself; but I cannot tell him about this. It is impossible; you do not understand what you are talking about. As for this meeting, it can easily be arranged; nothing could be easier, and then the whole thing will be at an end.’

‘I hope so, I hope so indeed!’ said Margaret fervently. ‘I am sure I will do my best to make it the end. But where do you propose that the meeting should take place?’

‘Why not in the gardens of Esbêkiah? There are plenty of quiet nooks there where you could see him and talk to him without fear of being disturbed. To-morrow is Sunday, and you can have the whole day free. What more natural than that you should go for a walk in the Esbêkiah gardens? You write and tell him to be at a certain spot at a certain time, and the thing is done.’

‘I hate the very idea of it!’ said Margaret energetically. ‘I have never done such a thing in my life before, and I think it is a vulgar and an odious business. Why should I not write and tell him that a meeting is undesirable, and that we should prefer him to pack up the star in a little box and leave it with the porter directed to me, as he did the letter. That would be the simplest plan, and I do not see why he should not do that.’

‘He will not,’ said Valda with decision. ‘If he had wished for that he would have suggested it himself; it is sufficiently obvious to anybody. He wishes for a meeting, and I think it is only natural. It will be no good proposing anything else.’

‘I am sure that trouble will come of it. In the Esbêkiah gardens people are passing through all day, and if one wishes to avoid notice, that is just the time when one is sure to attract it. I am not accustomed to that sort of thing, and I know that I shall make a mess of it somehow.’

‘Well, perhaps a public place like that is not the best,’ said Valda reflectively. ‘Some stranger might see you and speak about it afterwards, and Cairo is such a place for bad tongues. Our own

people, on the contrary, are discreet, and they know better than to chatter about all they see. Yes, perhaps on the whole it will be better for you to see him here. The Pâsha always goes out on Sundays, and who can tell that some unlucky chance might not take him to Esbêkiah? Here, however, it is quite certain that he will not be, and nobody would ever dream that any one who came to see you could have anything to do with me. Yes, it had better be here. Write to him to come to the *selâmlek*, and ask for you; you can meet him there, and take him to the outer garden where no one ever goes, and where you will be perfectly safe from observation. I will send a message to the guards that you have my leave to take your friends to see the gardens, and they will think it perfectly natural.'

'I don't like that plan either,' said Margaret. 'If I had friends to see the gardens they would be ladies, or at least gentlemen and ladies; but this officer coming all alone,—the guards will think,—really I don't know what they will think.'

'They will think that you have an admirer,' said Valda smiling, and then she added with a sigh, 'well, and if they do, what does it matter? It is no harm for you, lucky woman that you are. You can meet anybody that you like, and no one can say you nay, while I——' She broke off suddenly, and then, as she met Margaret's grave glance, continued in a different tone, 'Well, never mind, I know that you think me very discontented and ungrateful. Now go and write your letter, and bring it to me when you have

done, that I may hear what you have said before you send it.'

Margaret left the garden ; but she was not long away, and Valda uttered an exclamation of surprise to see her back so soon. 'What, you have written it already ? Well, you have been quick ! What have you said ?'

Margaret read out :—

Miss Grey begs to acknowledge Captain Fitzroy's note, and she thanks him for the trouble he has taken in the matter. He is right in his conjecture as to her identity, and she will be glad to meet him to receive the ornament that he speaks of. If it is convenient to him, will he kindly call to-morrow afternoon, and ask at the gate for 'Mademoiselle.' He will be shown into the *selâmlek*, and she will come to him there.

'It is very short,' objected Valda, 'and it is not at all amiable. You do not say anything about me, and you speak of his restoring the star as if that were a matter of course. You do not give him the least credit for doing it.'

'Of course he wishes to restore it,' said Margaret. 'No man of honour would ever dream of keeping a valuable thing like that, if there were any possibility of restoring it to its owner. That is a matter of course ; and it is best not to put down in black and white any unnecessary detail. I avoided mentioning your name on purpose,' she added firmly ; 'I thought you would prefer it.'

'Well, yes, perhaps it is best. Very well then, send that letter. As you say, it is safer to be vague ; if anyone were to get hold of that there is nothing to be made out of it. And you tell me

that English people are accustomed to stiff letters, —his was rather stiff and formal too, wasn't it? Send it then, and may the eye of Allah protect it! But you had better post it yourself, to avoid accidents.'

Margaret went out in the afternoon for that purpose, while Djemâl-ed-Din was asleep and Valda was engaged in receiving visitors. It was rather a long walk to the post, and when she returned, flushed and exhausted with the heat, Valda's friends were leaving. She met them coming down the marble steps in their white *yâshmâks* and black mantles on their way to the carriages, where their slaves were waiting to hand them in, and when she entered the hall she found Valda there alone, dressed in a loosely-fitting Turkish gown of rich gold and green brocade. 'I am going to my own rooms to see if Djemâl-ed-Din is awake,' she said. 'Will you come to me there when you have taken off your things? I want a talk with you.'

Djemâl-ed-Din was still asleep when Margaret rejoined his mother, and Ayôosha was on her knees on the floor by the side of the couch on which the child lay, waving the *senaclic* with its long streamers of red horsehair to keep the flies away. Valda beckoned Margaret to follow her into the next room, where she settled herself upon a divan by an open window. 'Well,' she said, 'you have sent off the letter? That is good. Then to-morrow he will come. And now what shall we say to him? There is that to be considered.'

'There is only one thing to be said,' answered Margaret quickly. 'We must say that we thank

him very much for his kindness and consideration, that you are very grateful to him for saving your little boy, and that you are glad to get back the star, but that you can hold no further communication with him. There is nothing else to be said.'

Valda looked distressed. 'I am afraid that you are going to be so ungracious to him, Mademoiselle ; I wish I could manage it myself. He has saved to me the only treasure that I care for in the world, my little boy : he is going to bring back this star, which no doubt he thinks I value highly ; and you will receive him in your stiff English way, with just a formal word of thanks, while you show by your manner that you are longing to get rid of him, and that you hope never to see him again. That is not what I wish.'

'What do you wish, Hânem ?' asked Margaret seriously.

'I wish him to know that Turkish ladies have hearts, and that they know how to feel and to be grateful,' answered Valda impulsively. 'I want you to tell him that, though I can never speak to him, and shall very likely never see him again, yet I shall never forget what he has done for me. His countrymen galloped by, despising the distress of the poor Turkish lady, and covering her with mud and dust, but he,—he was different. He was too noble to do that. He picked up my baby from under the horses' feet that would have trampled him to death, and if I gave him every jewel that I possess I could never repay him. Tell him that I shall never cease to think of him with admiration and gratitude, and that I shall pray every day and

every night, so long as I live, to beg Allah to reward him.'

'Dear Valda, I think that you overestimate his services a little. Of course it was abominable of those tourists to ride by so rudely and inconsiderately, and in contrast to their behaviour it seemed the nicer of him to stop and pick up Djemâl-ed-Din when he saw your alarm; but I don't think the child was really in any serious danger, and to the English officer it would seem a little thing that he did. He would be astonished if I were to deliver to him such a message as that. I could not do it.'

'Well, perhaps you need not tell him quite all that; but I wish you to make him understand that I am really grateful. And as to the star, I do not want it back. My little Djemâl-ed-Din gave it to him, and he can keep it. Tell him that I should like him to keep it as the token of a Turkish lady's gratitude.'

Margaret was aghast at this idea, and she made no effort to contain her dismay. 'Oh, Valda, that will never do! If it were a trivial ornament it might not perhaps matter; but this is far too valuable a thing.'

'Too valuable!' exclaimed Valda in great indignation. 'What is it worth in comparison with the life of my baby? Not ten *paras*! Too valuable! On the contrary, it is not half valuable enough; nothing could be valuable enough to reward him for what he has done.'

From this position Valda was not to be moved. All that Margaret could say about the wrong to



the Pâsha, the risk of misconstruction on the part of the stranger, and the danger to herself, was without effect. Valda insisted that the jewel was her own property, and that she had a right to confirm the gift that Djemâl-ed-Din had made.

‘In that case I am very sorry that I have sent off the letter,’ said Margaret. ‘If I had understood this before I would certainly not have consented to make any appointment with him. The only object in his coming here was to give him a safe opportunity of restoring the diamonds.’

‘We had to thank him, we had to explain to him how it happened,’ said Valda.

‘That could have been done perfectly well by letter ; indeed, it can be done still. If you are really determined not to take the diamonds back, I had better write and say so, and tell him that there is no need for him to come here to-morrow. He will get the letter in time if I write at once.’

Margaret slipped off the divan as she spoke, but Valda sprang up after her, and caught her arm. ‘No, Mademoiselle, no, you are not going to be so unkind ! I wish you to see him. I don’t want you to write another cold, unfeeling letter ; I want you to speak to him yourself, and to hear what he says. Then you can explain, you can see what he is like, and you can tell me afterwards. You have no feeling for me, no sympathy ; what have I done that you should be so unkind ?’ She stopped short, with her lips quivering and her eyes full of tears, and she turned her face away, with difficulty suppressing a sob.

Margaret was ready to cry herself, but it was

because of the failure of her efforts to influence Valda. Her remonstrances had been thrown away, and now she had heard the Pâsha's step in the corridor outside. Valda heard it too, and her face changed instantly. 'Mind, Mademoiselle,' she said, dashing away her tears, 'not a word to the Pâsha !'

## CHAPTER X

SUNDAY in modern Cairo is a very festive day, and Captain Fitzroy was not the sort of man to suffer from too much leisure for lack of engagements ; but he had never looked forward to anything so eagerly as to the prospect opened to him by Margaret Grey's letter. It did not strike him that the note was stiff ; that seemed only a natural consequence of the use of the third person ; and he was filled with elation at the success of his wishes. It was true that it was not the lovely face filling all his thoughts that he was going to see : it was only her delegate who would meet him ; but even that was something ; it was a beginning, and how far it might go Fitzroy did not stop to think. From his point of view there was no reason that it should be the end.

He dressed with care in plain clothes, putting off his dark blue Khedivial uniform for the lightest of gray summer suits ; and taking the first hired carriage that he saw, he drove in good time to the place of appointment. In spite of his equipage, which chanced to be unusually shabby even for a Cairene cab, he was received with great respect by the porter, whose native sharpness enabled him to

recognise at once the manner and appearance of a person of distinction ; and he was shown with many *salaams* into a small reception-room in the colon-naded building within the gate. Here he had to wait for some minutes while one of the slaves took his card to the *harîm*, and he stood absently looking about him at the dusty furnishings of the room. White-sheeted divans ranged round the walls, tall mirrors in gilt frames above them, and a rich carpet under foot ; it was the usual thing, and his own room in the 'Abdin palace was exactly like it, just as characterless, uninteresting, and dusty. Was this the pattern of all Turkish interiors, he wondered ? Were the rooms of the *harîm*, the rooms *she* lived in, as dull and featureless ? No, that was not likely ; she would be sure to have flowers about her, and other evidences of her own grace and refinement. His mind followed the messenger who had gone across the garden, and he had lost himself in the dreams in which he had been living all the week, when he heard the rustle of a skirt in the doorway, and turning suddenly, saw a slight, fragile-looking girl of about two or three and twenty standing in the room behind him. She was dressed entirely in gray, yes, in the same quiet gown of gray alpaca that had been beside him in church on Christmas morning ; and she was standing silent, looking at him with a pink flush on her cheeks and a curious intentness in her gray eyes. At that first moment of the meeting she made a favourable impression upon him, and he said to himself that she was evidently a lady and decidedly pretty.

'Miss Grey, I suppose,' he said, coming for-

ward, and holding out his hand with a smile of greeting.

Margaret was hardly prepared for so friendly a salutation, and she looked rather taken aback. She had intended only to bow, and she was obliged to change her mind in awkward haste.

‘Yes,’ she said briefly, and then, glancing rather nervously at a second open doorway leading between the divans into another room, she added hurriedly: ‘Will you come into the garden? It is cooler and pleasanter than here, and if you have anything of a private nature to say, I think it would be better to say it there.’

She led the way out, through the garden steeped in the hot afternoon sunshine and fragrant with the scent of roses and jessamine, to the archway in the wall which was the entrance to the outer garden of the *harim*. The arabesque-covered walls of the palace rose on the right, shining yellow in the strong sunlight; but Margaret turned at once into one of the inlaid paths winding among the shrubberies of orange and lemon trees on the left, and followed it until she reached a secluded corner at the end of the garden, where straggling bushes of the crimson damask-rose grew in wild profusion under the wall, and a graceful pepper-tree, with silver-gray foliage as delicate as maidenhair, shot up into the pale Eastern sky. Here, in the dense green shade of the mandalines, a dilapidated garden-seat, of the pattern common in London parks, was drawn up, and Margaret paused with her hand on the back of it.

‘We shall be quite undisturbed here,’ she said,

‘and there is no danger of our being observed or overheard. You have come about the diamond star that you found in your pocket after you picked up the little boy at Ghesireh, haven’t you?’

‘Yes,’ said Fitzroy in some surprise; ‘but how did you know that I found it in my pocket?’

‘Because the child told us that he had placed it there,’ said Margaret; ‘he told us directly we got home.’

‘And you have been taking no steps to recover it?’

‘No, because no steps were possible in the circumstances. We could not act without the knowledge of the Pâsha, and the lady did not wish her husband to know anything about the incident.’

‘Her husband,—she is married then? She is the wife of the Pâsha, the mother of that child?’

‘Yes; and,—Captain Fitzroy,—I don’t know if you have been long in Egypt—perhaps you do not realise the strictness of Turkish etiquette. It was not your fault, of course, but from their point of view it was a very serious thing that happened. For a Turkish lady to be seen by any man other than her husband or near relative is a grave misfortune.’

In her anxiety to make the risk of the situation clear Margaret was betrayed into expressing herself with an earnestness that verged upon severity, and Fitzroy stood still for a moment in astonished silence under what sounded like a rebuke. When he spoke it was with marked coldness. ‘I do not understand you. You say that it was not my fault; *what* was not my fault, may I ask? That I picked

up a child I saw straying into danger, and gave him to his mother? That I have taken measures since to restore the ornament which the child lost? No, I certainly do not see that I have been in fault. I cannot see there has been any fault anywhere.'

The turn that the conversation had taken was not unnatural, considering the point of view from which Margaret regarded the matter and the character of the man with whom she had to deal; but it was unfortunate, and she felt that she must have blundered strangely to find herself at loggerheads with him so soon. She was not saying what she had intended; she was nervous, and painfully conscious that she was not carrying out her mission in a manner that Valda would have approved of. She did not know how to act, and she stood silent for a moment with compressed lips, considering how she could repair her error, and yet gain her end. A soft breath of scented air swept like a sigh over the sunny garden, stirring the delicate tracery of the pepper-tree against the blue sky, and fluttering the little red roses under the wall. It floated out the folds of a gray veil that Margaret was wearing, and as she pushed up the gauze to be out of her way, Fitzroy looked with attention at her features. Her colour had faded, and the pale, intellectual face, refined into absolute severity, was without attraction for him. It annoyed him by the suggestion of a higher standard than he cared to reach, and his handsome countenance hardened into an expression of antagonism.

'I am afraid that I must have expressed myself

very badly,' said Margaret, breaking the pause in the gentlest tones at her command. 'I am sorry if I have annoyed you ; of course there has been no fault on anyone's part, and I did not mean to infer that there had been. Only I am so very anxious that this lady should not get into trouble, and a misunderstanding is so easy where there is not the frankness that exists between husband and wife in England. I thought you might not understand.'

'Oh, I think I understand ; I have not been two years in Egypt for nothing. The Pâsha is jealous of his beautiful wife, I suppose?'

'Oh, no, no ! Nothing of that sort !' cried Margaret, a vivid blush overspreading her face, as she saw his cynical smile. 'She has never given him the slightest cause and she never will. It is nothing so vulgar as that ; it is only a matter of etiquette. She has asked me to tell you that she is exceedingly grateful to you for what you have done for her, and to explain the necessity for keeping it secret. She considered that it was no use vexing the Pâsha by letting him know of it. You see, it would annoy him very much, and it was purely an accident, for which nobody was to blame.'

'Was *she* annoyed ? Is *she* vexed about it ?' asked Fitzroy, with a wistfulness that broke oddly through his stately composure.

'No indeed !' answered Margaret, her voice softening. 'She knows how it was, of course, and she feels nothing but the most fervent gratitude towards you. She says that you have saved her



greatest treasure in the world, and that she can never repay you for it. I ought to have given you her message first. The little boy is her only child, and she regards you as his rescuer from death. She blesses you every moment of the day for having preserved him to her.'

Fitzroy sighed, though his face had lighted up. 'If I could see her just once to hear from her own lips what she thinks,—to give her back the star—I should like to give the jewel back into her own hands.

'That is impossible, absolutely impossible!' said Margaret firmly. 'That is what I have been trying to explain; you can never see her again.'

Fitzroy looked at her,—this prim, proper little person who was opposing herself to his desire. Who was she that he should regard her? Antagonism leaped again into his eyes. 'I must see her, I will see her! I do not choose to have my last word with her through you. I can see that your prejudices will not let you deal frankly with either of us, and I will see her for myself to restore the jewel. I will manage it by some means or other.'

'You must not try! You could not try without bringing serious risk upon her, and it would be quite in vain,' said Margaret in alarm. 'I implore you not to attempt anything so wrong and inconsiderate. She will never consent to it.'

'I don't want her to consent. It shall not be her doing, and she shall be involved in no trouble. I will take care of that; I will manage it for myself, and there shall be no chance of blame falling on anyone else.'

‘That is a thing you cannot do. If anything comes out, it will be no use saying that you have acted without encouragement from her. Nobody would believe it, and it would be she, not you, who would suffer. Suspicion would be aroused, reports would be set going, and who can say what would be the end? I warn you that if you try, mischief will come out of it; Valda Hânem herself would tell you the same thing.’

‘Valda Hânem,—the Lady Valda,—is that her name?’

‘Yes,’ answered Margaret, regretting the slip she had made, but perceiving that it was now too late to repair it.

‘It is a charming name.’

‘I think so because I associate it with her,’ said Margaret; ‘but you do not know her. If you did,—if you could know how kind and gentle she is,—how good and devoted, and how dearly cherished in the home that she makes happy, I am sure you would not like to do anything that would risk bringing trouble and misfortune into her peaceful life.’

‘She is happy? You think that she herself is happy?’

‘She ought to be. She has everything that she ought to want to make her happy, and she knows no other life,’ said Margaret resolutely. ‘It is a lot that many women have cause to envy.’

‘This Pâsha is kind to her then, and she loves him,—does she love him?’ Then as Margaret hesitated, unable for an instant to meet his glance,

he went on : 'No, she does not ; she does not love him, and you cannot say so ; yet you tell me that she is happy,—what nonsense !'

'Why do you ask me such questions ?' asked Margaret indignantly. 'What right have you ? But since you have done so, I will answer you. Valda Hânem may not love her husband quite as an English girl might do ; but she is an affectionate and devoted wife, and she quite recognises how good the Pâsha is to her.'

'But he is a Turk ; he has other wives of course. The Circassians of his *harim*——'

'No indeed, no, no ! What a detestable thing to say !'

'Not detestable at all according to the customs of the country. It is considered permissible and right,—it is the usual thing.'

'Not now, not among Turks of the highest class. They are strict monogamists, and the Pâsha—oh, how little you know the facts ! But I cannot talk to you about it ; I could not make you understand. Only this warning I am bound to give you ; if you go on with this, you will repent it. As to the star,—have you brought it with you to-day ?'

'Yes, I have.' Fitzroy took a small parcel, wrapped in silver paper, from his breast-pocket as he spoke, and disclosed the beautiful jewel, which flashed like a real star in his hand. 'I have brought it and I meant to have restored it to her through you, but I have changed my mind. I will keep it now until I can give it into the Lady Valda's own hands. I shall try at any rate, and if I do

not succeed, then I shall find some other means of restoring it to her.'

'Keep the jewel,' said Margaret with decision ; 'she does not want it back. She told me to say that, since her little boy had given it to you, she would like you to keep it as a token of her gratitude. It is her own property, not her husband's, and she has a right to give it away if she chooses ; but I persuaded her that it would not be right to do so on grounds of expediency. I said that I would not give you her message, but now I do ; it is far better that you should keep it than that you should make it an excuse for seeking an interview with her. If you will only refrain from exhibiting it in this country where it might be recognised, that is all I ask.'

Fitzroy wrapped up the jewel and replaced it in his pocket. Then he looked straight at Margaret, and said, very quietly and deliberately, but with an ominous flash in his eyes : 'The condition you make is unnecessary. I shall not keep this ornament : I should never dream of keeping it ; and eventually it will be restored to the lady. You can tell her so. The time and place when it will be done I cannot tell you, and it may be that it will not be by my hand that she receives it after all ; but certainly it will not be through you.'

'In that case,' said Margaret with dignity, 'it is useless to prolong this interview, which cannot be more disagreeable to you than it is to me. Allow me to show you the way back to the *selâmlek*.'

She preceded him along the patterned path, and

she did not speak to him again. Her face was white, whiter than the pale roses that flung their clusters into the darkness of the archway, and her gray eyes were strained in a painful stare as she gazed after his departing figure ; but the delicate pencilling of her eyebrows was like a straight line across her forehead, and the fine lines of her mouth were fixed and firm.

Fitzroy did not offer his hand at parting, and his stiff bow was returned only by the slightest inclination of the head on her part.

‘ Good afternoon,’ he said formally, but Margaret did not answer ; and without noticing the porter, who was smiling and salaaming in the background in the hope of *backsheesh*, he turned away in a silent rage. ‘ I have been a fool,’ he said to himself before he had gone ten yards from the gate ; ‘ I have made an enemy of the only person who could have helped me. It would have been so easy for her to have arranged a meeting. What possessed me to quarrel with her ?’ As he made his way further into the teeming streets of the city, however, the perception came more clearly home to him that the quarrel had not been of his making. ‘ She is not my sort, and she and I were bound to disagree,’ he reflected. ‘ Detestable little prude ! I suppose she imagined I intended some vulgar intrigue, and she was prepared to act on the defensive. As if there could be any harm or danger in my meeting them on one of their drives, or in the bazaars. I consider that I have a right to receive my thanks from her own lips, and I will claim it.’

Proud, passionate, and exceedingly tenacious of purpose, Henry Fitzroy was a man of no ordinary type of character, and either by accident or intuition, Margaret, in her study of his handwriting, had divined certain points in it with singular accuracy. It was a character whose faults were balanced by many good points, but all his qualities were fenced about with such an impenetrable wall of reserve that he was more respected than beloved, and there were few people who could feel that they really knew him. He was the sort of man who is known even to his most intimate friends by his surname only, and women were generally a good deal afraid of him. His boyish name of Harry had fallen from him in very early infancy, and his mother and sisters always spoke of Henry with high reverence and respect as the most important and distinguished representative of the family, though it is very possible that they felt more real affection for Jack, the foolish, fussy, and exceedingly fallible elder brother who had succeeded to the family estates, and who commanded no respect at all. The Fitzroys were refined and cultivated people, and the influences under which he had grown up, together with a natural fastidiousness of taste, had combined to make Henry Fitzroy a very polished and gentlemanly person, who felt that he had a right to think well of himself. He was accustomed to carry everything before him in society, and now, when his nature was stirred to its depths by a force that it had never known before, and his mind was set upon the gratification of what seemed to him an innocent desire, he was indignant

and annoyed to find himself misconceived and opposed.

‘I do not believe that my beautiful lady herself would feel the slightest scruple about it,’ he said to himself. ‘It is only that mischievous little prig of a governess who is determined to make trouble. I will circumvent her,—I shall have not the least compunction in doing so,—and as for the Pâsha ———’ It was clear from the contemptuous curl of his short upper lip that Fitzroy regarded the prejudices of a Turkish husband with small consideration. Indeed, in spite of the assurance he had received from Margaret, he thought of the Pâsha as a lazy, effete, self-indulgent representative of a race that would be far better wiped off the face of the earth; and in the plenitude of his prejudice and his ignorance he was prepared to plunge into an enterprise of which he knew not the perils.

If any experienced person had been at hand to advise him, he would have been told that a stab in the back in the crowded bazaars of Cairo, or a brief application of the bowstring in the back room of some dingy coffee-house, would very probably be the end of the adventure. And if he escaped these dangers, there were others: a pistol-shot from the marshes on the road to the Pyramids, a cup of coffee oddly flavoured,—there were many ways in which revenge could be worked out by an Oriental mind; he would disappear and be no more heard of, like so many others who had once played a part in this populous city, and no efforts of the English consulate would avail to discover

his body lying quiet in the yellow mud at the bottom of the Nile.

Henry Fitzroy received no warning, and if he had he would not have listened to it. He confided in no one. He kept the diamonds locked up in his dressing-case, and he breathed no word about the matter to any of his friends ; but his mind was none the less firmly set upon his purpose.



## CHAPTER XI

MARGARET went up the marble steps of the grand entrance to the *harim* with a heavy heart. The ladies were all out driving, and the slaves, making holiday in their absence, were fluttering in and out of the palace doors like a flock of brilliant birds let loose from a cage. In their flowing robes of bright-coloured cottons they looked wonderfully picturesque as they leaned over the white marble balustrade, and they filled the air with merry laughter as they chattered with the black-coated negroes. Anâna, an old slave of between sixty and seventy, who had nursed three generations of the family, was a tyrant over the younger Circassians, and generally kept them in order with voice and hand whenever she thought they were up to mischief, but at this moment she was absorbed in the contemplation of the beauties of her fat legs. She had just emerged from a very hot bath, and with her hair new-dyed to a bright vermilion colour, arranged under a brilliant blue head-dress, and her twinkling brown eyes freshly marked with black, she was very proud of herself. The slaves had been propitiating her with compliments upon a new pair of yellow and black striped stockings, and she sat on the red satin divan in the reception-

hall, holding up her clean white cotton robes, and displaying with supreme satisfaction a pair of the thickest ankles that ever were seen.

‘*Bac, Marmoselle!*’ she cried, calling to Margaret to look as she passed through. ‘*Baczâna, pek guzâil!* (Look here, very pretty!)’

Margaret stopped and paid the little tribute of admiration that was expected of her, but she could scarcely help laughing. It had always amused her to observe how entirely the delicacy of the Circassians was confined to their faces. They would shriek as they covered their heads in a hurry from the gaze of masculine eyes; but as to their legs they were absolutely indifferent. Most of them had extraordinarily thick ankles, and they displayed them carelessly on all occasions, looping up their draperies, and drawing forth with perfect serenity their pocket-handkerchiefs which they wore tucked into their garters. Conventionality has strange laws, however, and they are manifested in curiously contradictory fashion, concerning themselves with ankles in one society, and with the hair of the head in another. Margaret could perceive an analogy in the European ladies who feel themselves perfectly respectable in the bathing-costumes of Boulogne so long as their necks are safely covered, and are equally happy in the most *décolletée* of ball-dresses, provided the skirts are sufficiently long. At the one point or the other it seems necessary that the laws of convention should assert themselves in order that the delicacy of feminine feelings may be vindicated; and Margaret reflected that after all the Circassians were

more consistent than their European sisters in always keeping to the same end.

The idiosyncrasies of the slaves had always interested and amused Margaret, and she did not in the least mind finding herself left to their society when the ladies went out. Invariably considerate and sympathetic with them, she had become a general favourite, and was a welcome spectator of the strange barbaric dances that they delighted in performing whenever Anâna's back was turned ; but to-day she had no heart to enter into their amusements, and she hurried away as soon as she could make good her escape. She was looking forward with despondency and mis-giving to the inevitable explanation with Valda, and she wished that it were over. This was not the end then, as she had so confidently hoped ; on the contrary, it seemed but the beginning of complications. What would be the effect upon Valda ? What would she say ?

It was late in the afternoon when the ladies returned from their visits, and they brought back a party of friends with them, so that Valda was unable to escape to her own rooms ; but about half an hour before dinner she sent one of the slaves with a message asking Mademoiselle to come up to her, and she came half-way down the the grand staircase to meet her. She was dressed in a trailing Parisian tea-gown of blue-green velvet trimmed with silver lace ; and with diamonds flashing in her hair and at her throat and ears, her magnificent Southern beauty had a strange moon-light effect that was almost startling. She was

very pale, but her beautiful eyes, with the dark markings under the lashes enhancing their lustre, were brilliant with excitement ; and as soon as she saw Margaret she held out her slim white hand with an eager gesture.

‘I sent for you, Mademoiselle,’ she said in a stifled voice ; ‘I felt that I could not endure to wait all through dinner without knowing what has happened. Tell,—oh, Mademoiselle, it is not good news that you bring—I see by your face that it is not. Sit down and tell me, tell me everything.’

She sat down on the wide flight of steps on which she was standing, and motioned to Margaret to take her place by her side. The richly carpeted staircase, forming a position of vantage which commanded a view of all the state apartments of the *harim*,—one leading into another with contrivances of glass doorways and great mirrors that gave a bewildering impression of space and perspective,—was the favourite resting-place of the ladies. At this hour the great rooms were growing dark, and the dim light of a few wax candles, flickering here and there in the glass lustres hanging from the ceilings and projecting from the walls, did but add to the gloom and mystery of the great hall. With a disregard for appearances, even more remarkable in the Turks than in the Irish, the slaves were allowed to stick one candle here and another there, just where light was absolutely necessary, and the effect was apt to be desolate and disorderly in the extreme ; but the ladies were accustomed to the combination

of splendour and luxury with makeshifts and discomforts of all sorts, and they did not seem to mind it in the least.

Margaret sat down beside her companion under a branching lustre with one solitary candle in it, and felt that from some points of view this barbaric simplicity was not without advantages. The quietness and privacy of the place were complete ; a sound of singing and dancing, going on for the entertainment of Turkish visitors in a reception-room far within the suite of the state-rooms on the first floor, penetrated faintly through the glass doors, but there was no one anywhere near the stairs. The slaves were lazily preparing the table for dinner in the saloon down-stairs, and occasionally one of them would flit across the gloomy spaces of the hall ; but even if they had come near enough to hear, they could not have understood a word of the low-voiced conversation in French going on upon the stairs.

‘Well, you have seen him at least, and without running any risks,—that is something,’ said Valda. ‘And now tell me what he said and what he did ; I want to know everything. Has he given you the diamonds?’

‘No,’ said Margaret. ‘He had them with him, but he would not give them to me ; he told me that he wished to receive his thanks direct from your own lips, and he said that he intended to keep the star until he could give it into your own hands.’

There was a note of despair in Margaret’s quiet tones, but her face was calm and steady. It was

Valda who looked aghast. 'That is impossible,' she said in a shocked whisper; 'that can never, never be! Did you not tell him so, Mademoiselle?'

'Yes, I told him so, but——' Margaret paused for a moment. 'He would not listen to me; I could make no impression upon him. I tried, but I did not succeed, and I am afraid that I may have done more harm than good. I had better tell you all about it.'

She gave a faithful account of the interview, and then Valda questioned and cross-questioned her until she was in possession of all the facts, and was able to form almost as clear a conception of the scene as if she had been present at it herself.

'I can see that you have been very cold and unkind in your manner to him, Mademoiselle,' she said reproachfully. 'Such a splendid cavalier, so brave and gallant and distinguished,—how could you? He must have thought you very cruel and discouraging.'

'I don't know,' said Margaret hopelessly; 'I don't care what he thought of me. If only he had been discouraged! But he was not. He was determined to see you, and he will try to do it. There will be trouble,—I know there will be trouble.'

'What trouble, Mademoiselle?' asked Valda with dignity. 'What can he do? Without your connivance, or mine, it is impossible for him to see me, and you know that neither of us will help him. He can do nothing, poor man! He is destined to wear out his efforts in vain, and you will not spare

him so much as a thought or a word of pity. Truly I think you English ladies are too hard-hearted.'

Margaret was silent. She did not think any the less of Valda for being unlike herself in this respect, but she wished that she had been guarded by that most formidable of all a woman's defences, the love of her husband already entrenched in the stronghold of her heart. It was the weakness of her position in this respect, together with her total lack of experience in the ways of the world, that made Margaret tremble for her.

'How you can possibly resist any one so fascinating is a mystery to me,' said Valda after a pause. 'I have never seen anyone whom the Khedivial uniform became so well,—but he was not in it to-day,—a suit of light gray you said he wore, didn't you?'

'Yes,' said Margaret unwillingly.

'No doubt it suited him just as well; he would look like a prince in any dress,' said Valda with a sigh. 'All the world admires him, and he is immensely sought after by the English ladies, I hear. Hamîda Hânem knows all about him, and she says that he is considered to be the handsomest Englishman in Cairo.'

'Hamîda Hânem,—have you told *her* about this?' asked Margaret in a tone of consternation.

'Not the whole story, of course; she does not know a word about the accident to Djemâl-ed-Din and the loss of the star. Of course I should not think of telling her that; I only said that I had observed this handsome Englishman in the uniform

of the Khedive, and that I admired him. And then she laughed, and said that I was not the only one. She does not know that perhaps in another way I am the only one. I may not be the only Turkish lady who admires him, but I think it very probable that I am the only one whom he is interested in.'

She knew that he had admired her. She had read the expression in his eyes under the acacias of Ghesireh, a look of something more than admiration. She would have been less than a woman if she had not known what it meant ; but she could speak of it, she could think and dream of it, and hug the knowledge of it to her heart as if it were a cordial that could warm and support her in the gray monotony of her cold married life. That seemed to Margaret a shocking and ominous state of things, and she could not let it pass without remonstrance.

'Oh, dear Valda,' she said earnestly, 'let me beg you to free yourself from this infatuation ! What can this Englishman ever be to you, or you to him, that you should waste two thoughts upon him ? As you say, he can never enter into your life, but the very thought of him in your heart is a misfortune. To cherish it is an act of disloyalty to the Pâsha ; and His Excellency is so good, so faithful and devoted to you. What is a handsome face that you know nothing whatever about compared with a lifetime of devotion ?'

'It is a romance, it is an illusion !' said Valda passionately. 'It is the thing that I have longed for all my life without knowing it ! And I have never tasted it, never realised what it was until



now. Before you came and told me the love-stories of English and French girls I did not even know what it might be in other lives. I had no higher conceptions about it than these poor slaves, who are something between children and animals. Now I know,—now I feel it in my heart like a fire that burns, like a magic elixir that makes life glorious,—and you tell me not to cherish it !’

She sat crouched in her splendid draperies on the wide empty staircase, her beautiful face quivering, her diamonds flashing in the dim light, and there was a moment of silence. Margaret looked at her sorrowfully. ‘It is a sin,’ she said.

‘A sin !’ cried Valda, springing to her feet, and standing erect and dignified against the carved banisters. ‘No, Mademoiselle ! It will never be that. Do not be afraid ; a Turkish woman of such a family as mine is secure from any sacrifice of honour. My father was one of the Sultan’s chiefest generals, the son of generations of soldiers, and I am not his daughter for nothing. I can suffer if need be, but I will never bring a stain upon the honour of my family.’

‘It is not that,—it is not anything of that sort that I am afraid of,’ said poor Margaret, with burning cheeks. ‘It is your own happiness, and your husband’s, which must be affected through yours, that I see at stake, and I cannot help longing to save you. Forgive me, dear Valda—’

‘You do not know me, Mademoiselle. You have heard stories, no doubt, here in Cairo of the doings of some of these Egyptian ladies,—but we are not like them. They use their *yâshmâks* as a

mask for licence, and some of them do terrible things. You know what is whispered about the English soldiers who disappear from their regiments, and are put down as deserters; they have not deserted at all really,—they are dead,—they have been killed by the slaves of these wicked women. If I were one of them, I should think nothing of arranging secret meetings in the garden with anyone whom I liked. We are safely guarded, everybody thinks, but who can guard a woman who cares to take the trouble to evade her restrictions? The very security of her husband's mind makes it the more easy for her to deceive him. I could tell you of instances——'

'Ah, do not, do not!' cried Margaret desperately. 'Dear Valda, don't talk, don't even *think* of such things! They can only poison your mind, and destroy your chances of happiness. Rest satisfied with what you have. Believe me, it is more than is given to many of the women whose freedom you envy, and it should be enough to content you. By thinking about romance, by letting your mind dwell on illusions, you are playing with edged tools, and you risk losing your whole peace of mind. It is a frightfully dangerous game; give it up, dear Valda, give it up before it is too late and the mischief is done.'

But the mischief was done already, and the warning came too late,—Margaret saw it in the beautiful face. Valda did not answer, but she held up her hand with an involuntary gesture that was even more expressive than the strange look in her eyes.

## CHAPTER XII

‘MADEMOISELLE, there will be a representation of the *Godmother of Sharrie* at the theatre to-night, and I have secured a box for Madame ; shall you like to accompany her ?’

Margaret had come in at the end of a hot afternoon to find the Pâsha resting in his wife’s sitting-room ; he had just returned from a levée at the Khedive’s palace, and it had been a wearing and exhausting afternoon for him ; but he had driven round through the town in the heat, in order to secure a box which he had heard was vacant, and he was looking forward to the pleasure he thought his announcement would afford. He had been a little disappointed by the manner in which Valda had received it. She had thanked him without enthusiasm, almost with indifference, and she was now lying on her sofa drawn up to the side of his, looking with a smile of languid amusement at Margaret’s suddenly brightened face.

‘I should like it of all things,’ said Margaret eagerly, ‘if there is really room for me,—if Madame does not want any one else——’

She hesitated, and glanced for a moment at Valda doubtfully. Since that interview on the stairs, now

more than a week ago, she had become uncomfortably conscious that she had forfeited her place in Valda's confidence ; she had been supplanted by Hamîda Hânem, and she was not sure that Valda might not prefer her own countrywoman as a companion at the play. But it was not in Valda to be ungracious, and as she read the meaning of the appealing glance, she smiled encouragingly. 'No, I don't want any one else. You will be able to explain to me anything that I don't understand, and I shall enjoy it much more with you. You must certainly come, Mademoiselle.'

Margaret was relieved and delighted, and she was in such high spirits all the evening that Valda laughed at her.

'You needn't go to the trouble of dressing,' she said to her at dinner ; 'not a soul will see you. We shall drive to a special entrance where nobody is ever about except the slaves who attend the ladies ; and through the grating before the box it is impossible for any eye in the theatre to penetrate. I shall not even wear my *yâshmâk*,—as we shall be driving in the dark it will not be necessary ; a shawl over my head will be enough.'

In spite of this declaration, however, both ladies did go to some little trouble in adorning themselves for the occasion, and their pains were not wasted ; for a festive feeling in the mind seems to demand some external demonstration, and it is by no means entirely for the sake of an effect to be produced upon beholders that the need of personal adornment seems to be felt by women. Valda put on a Turkish gown of green and gold brocade that was

a favourite garment of hers because it was loose and comfortable, and she had diamonds in her hair, and a great silver clasp set with diamonds at her waist. She was so beautiful that whatever dress she wore seemed to suit her better than anything else she could have selected ; but in this she looked like a queen, and on one person, at least, its effect was not thrown away. The Pâsha was not given to paying compliments ; but this evening, as he escorted the two ladies through the *selâmlek* to their carriage on the other side, he was struck by his wife's great beauty, and he suffered his admiration to escape him. 'I think you grow more beautiful every day, Valda,' he said fondly ; 'you are absolutely perfect to-night.'

They were walking along a great empty corridor lighted only by the candle in the swinging lantern that the Pâsha carried, and Valda, with a lace handkerchief thrown over her head, was regarding with apprehensive glances the row of closed doors all along the right hand side of the passage. Since Margaret had found out the convenience of the *selâmlek* as a means of passing from one side of the palace to the other, she had used it freely, and Valda, when she had a cold or was in a hurry, would sometimes go that way too ; but she always covered up her face carefully before venturing on the risks of it, and without an effective veil she was not happy, even with her husband by her side to guard her.

The Pâsha did not seem at all nervous about the possible chance of encountering anybody. He knew that if any occupant of the place were to

make an appearance, a single word of warning from him would be enough. The man would turn his face to the wall in an instant, and wait until they had gone past. He was very secure in the possession of his wife, and he walked beside her with an air of pleasure and pride that touched Margaret even more than his involuntary tribute of admiration. Valda was not insensible to the tone of worship in his voice, and she held out her delicate hand towards him with a little gesture of acknowledgment which was full of grace and sweetness, but as she did so, she said laughingly : ‘ You are certainly an unblushing flatterer, Pâsha ! How can you possibly see what I look like in this den of darkness ? *Piff !* how horrible it smells ! It is plain that men do not understand how to make their habitations pleasant as we do.’

Valda, who kept her rooms full of fresh roses and mignonette, and bought strips of flannel soaked with attar of rose at twenty-five shillings a yard to lay between her dresses, could never pass through the musty air of the *selâmlek* without venting her disgust in this funny little exclamation ; and she would sometimes follow it up with remarks calculated seriously to offend the inhabitants of the place had they been overheard. Margaret remonstrated sometimes, but Valda replied in very audible tones that she did not care,—she only hoped that her words might reach the right ears and produce a salutary effect.

The Pâsha, however, accustomed to the air of the *selâmlek*, did not notice anything particular about it ; he was more interested in the subject of Valda’s

appearance. 'Oh, I could see what you looked like before you left our rooms,' he said; 'they are lighted brightly enough, and I noticed that you had got yourself up with especial effect to-night. Don't you think she has, Mademoiselle?' he asked, turning to Margaret.

'I don't know,' said Margaret smiling; 'I don't think that Madame could make herself otherwise than beautiful if she were to try.'

'No, she could not; and yet she tries to improve herself, you see. She gets herself up like this, and what is the object? No one will see her except her husband, who is already sufficiently enslaved—Ha! who is that?—*Destur!*'

He stopped short as Valda gave a little scream, and turned towards him, burying her face upon his shoulder. There was a sound of rapid steps on the stairs leading from this part of the *selâmlek* into a back yard of the palace, and a man, with a tall, stooping figure and a long, pale face that looked the longer and thinner for the crimson fez above it, appeared in the doorway. He stood for an instant as if bewildered, but at the warning cry of the Pâsha he turned and disappeared like a shot by the way that he had come.

'It was only Mâuheddin Bey, my brother's lame secretary,' said the Pâsha laughing. 'Poor old Mâuheddin, he is so short-sighted that he can scarcely see an inch beyond his nose, but in any case he would not be a dangerous person; he is singularly unsusceptible to the charms of feminine beauty.'

'That is lucky for him, since he is so ugly,'

remarked Valda. 'I never saw anything so hideous as that way he has of craning with his neck, and poking out his long straggling beard. How I detest beards,—I hate a man with a beard.'

The Pâsha smiled under his soldierly gray moustache, as he unlocked the door leading into the vestibule of the unused rooms at the end of the corridor. 'It was scarcely worth while dressing up to fascinate him, Valda,' he said mischievously. 'Môuheddin Bey is a regular misogynist, and that, no doubt, is the reason that he has never married. It is not often that a Turk remains a bachelor, but I really believe that poor old Môuheddin is afraid of women. I find that you have been disturbing his peace of mind very much lately, Mademoiselle.'

'I!' exclaimed Margaret in amazement.

'Yes, you, Mademoiselle. He came to me a few days ago, and asked me very seriously if I was aware that a lady was to be seen passing through the *selâmlek* every night. I suggested that she might be an angel, but he was not inclined for joking, and he got so angry at last that I had to explain the matter to him. You may now rely upon it that his door will always be kept carefully locked at the hour when you may be expected to go by.'

The Pâsha was in a mischievous mood that evening it was clear, and he could not resist the temptation to tease Margaret as well as Valda. He asked her if she shared in his wife's objection to beards, and if she would not think it worth while to rescue a really clever man from the hopeless state of forlorn bachelorhood into which



he was sinking. 'He is not poor,' the Pâsha said, 'and I should be delighted to settle a handsome dowry upon you, if you would like to make a match of it. What do you say?'

Margaret knew how to take a joke, and she laughed heartily at the notion of the Pâsha setting up as a match-maker for her benefit; but Valda took his proposals seriously, and repudiated them with indignation. 'How can you suggest such a thing, Pâsha? Such an old monster, such a tiresome, shabby, ugly old man! Of course it is not likely that Mademoiselle would care to marry a Turk at all,—but a man like Môuheddin Bey—*piff!* Now if you could find her a nice, handsome young Englishman whom you could engage as a secretary, so that there would be no danger of her ever wanting to go away, that would be something.'

Both Margaret and the Pâsha were overcome with laughter at the earnestness with which this view of the matter was urged, and Valda joined in. They were a very merry little party as they made their way along the interminable passages of the *harîm*, but as soon as they reached the reception-rooms they had to sober down. Here the ladies and the strange slaves were to be seen gliding away into corners and shielding themselves with their veils at the approach of a man, and the Pâsha instantly assumed the impassive aspect of grave decorum that he always wore when he passed through this part of the palace.

He came down the steps of the grand entrance to hand the two ladies into the closed carriage that was waiting for them in the garden, and he looked

benignantly in upon them through the carriage window as he wished them good-night. He was going to the theatre himself that night, but as it is against the rules of Turkish etiquette for a veiled lady to be seen in the company of a man, he could not go with his wife, and his own carriage was waiting for him at the entrance of the *selâmlék* in the outer courtyard.

‘*Bon soir, mesdames, et bon amusement,*’ he said, bowing as the negro sprang to his place on the box; and he had already closed the carriage door, when Valda put out her hand with an appealing gesture.

‘I wish you would come with us, Pâsha. It is quite dark, and not an eye would see you. You would like it, wouldn’t you, Mademoiselle, and you wouldn’t mind making room for him——’

‘Yes, do come, Pâsha,’ exclaimed Margaret, springing to the little seat so as to leave room for him by Valda; ‘why on earth shouldn’t you?’

‘It is an unheard of thing that you ask,’ objected the Pâsha; ‘it would be quite shocking and improper, and there would be no end of a scandal if I were seen,’ but his tone seemed to indicate that he was ready to be persuaded.

‘You won’t be seen,—that is just it,’ said Valda. ‘If you lean back in the corner by me in your dark uniform, there is not the slightest danger of your being seen. I wouldn’t urge you if there were.’

‘Do come, M. le Pâsha!’ said Margaret smiling.

‘Come, Pâsha-jim!’ coaxed Valda, and the endearing term in her caressing voice was irresistible.

He laughed, and pretended to hesitate a little longer, demurring against having to turn Margaret out of her place ; but she made it sufficiently clear that she did not mind, and then he only waited to send an order to his coachman before he sprang into the carriage.

‘This is most irregular,’ he said, laughing, as the landau dashed out of the gateway, and he threw himself back to avoid being seen by the guards as they rose to salute, ‘most irregular and improper, and I am afraid that I am encouraging you in lawless habits. Do you realise, Mademoiselle, that this is the very first time that I have ever driven out with my wife!’

Margaret thought it was an innovation that he seemed to enjoy. In the gleams of light that flashed into the carriage as they went past the street lamps, she could see how happy and delighted he looked. Valda had given him her hand to hold, and his other arm, thrown to the back of the carriage, looked suspiciously as if it were round her waist.

‘I think it is great fun,’ said Valda, ‘and I wish you would come oftener. It is entertaining to have a man to go out with,—don’t you think so, Mademoiselle?’

It was entertaining upon that occasion, Margaret was quite ready to agree. The Pâsha was like a school-boy out for a holiday, and the drive came to an end only too soon for him. When they came near the theatre he got out at a dark corner, and went on foot to the main entrance, while the carriage drove on to the side door of which Valda had spoken.

Margaret had seen *Charlie's Aunt* more than once in London, and the French version (without Penley, and with new points in dubious taste) was scarcely an improvement upon the original ; but she was in a mood for enjoyment that evening, and the gladness in her heart made the whole world seem bright. The box that she and Valda occupied was one of the best of the covered ones, and the fine wire netting over the front, though it made it look like a prison window from below, was not too close to interfere with a view of the stage from inside. Valda was keenly interested in the play, delighted with its humours, and charmed to find that from Margaret's explanations she was able to follow the intricacies of the plot. The evening was most successful, and she came home in the gayest spirits, looking forward so eagerly to a repetition of it the next evening that the Pâsha laughed at her enthusiasm. He prophesied that she would not care for the Wagnerian opera advertised for the next performance, but he made no difficulty about her going, and she again invited Margaret to be her companion.

'How I love going out in the evening like this !' Valda exclaimed delightedly, as she and Margaret were again whirled through the brilliantly lighted streets ; 'I should like to go to the theatre every night of my life.'

She was in a glow of anticipation, expecting to enjoy herself again as she had done the evening before ; but it is strange how seldom a pleasure will suffer itself to be repeated. The circumstances were changed ; the Pâsha was dining out

that evening, and going on to the theatre with his friends afterwards ; thus he was not of the party in the carriage, and both Margaret and Valda missed his kindly fun more than they cared to allow. From behind the lattice of her box Valda looked out for him among the red fezzes that were thickly dotted about the stalls, but she failed to discover him before the play began.

The piece that night was the opera of *Sigurd*, by a French composer of the school of Wagner, and it was well staged and finely acted. It was a first-rate opera, but Valda, who had never seen anything of the kind before, was first astonished and then disappointed. She knew too little about European music to be able to appreciate the orchestra, and she could not understand why the actors should scream out all their sentiments in song. It was much more difficult for her to grasp their meaning than in the play of the night before, and she was glad when the first act came to an end. In the interval before the second act Margaret tried to give her some idea of the argument, but she soon found that Valda's attention was wandering, and that she was more interested in observing the occupants of the European boxes in the theatre.

'That is Mrs. X.,' she said, pointing out a lady with a pretty, delicate face, and a *rivière* of diamonds on her white neck and shoulders, who was sitting in the front of one of the most conspicuous boxes, with two men behind her ; 'the one we met driving with the Prince G., don't you remember ? That is the Prince bending over to speak to her now. Look, she is laughing—Allah,

Allah, Allah!—the customs of these Europeans! Look at the diamonds she is wearing,—isn't it a shame? He will have none to give his poor wife when he marries.'

Valda seemed to know all about the European ladies who were present, the wives of the Consuls of different nationalities, and various other ladies of rank and standing, and she pointed them out to Margaret with amusing and rather cynical observations upon their characters and histories. She was interested in the men too, and as the *entr'acte* came to an end, and the stalls began to fill again, she bent her opera-glass upon them to make out those whom she knew by sight. 'I cannot see the Pâsha anywhere,' she said, sweeping the lines of the men's faces with her opera-glasses; and then, suddenly, she gave a violent start, and Margaret saw her hand tremble as she tried to steady the glass.

'Have you seen him?' Margaret asked; but Valda did not answer, and when she lowered the glasses it was clear from her expression that it was not the Pâsha whom she had found. '*C'est lui, c'est lui!*' she murmured with a white face and shining eyes. '*Oh, mon Dieu, c'est bien lui!*'

Margaret caught up the glasses as they fell from her hand, and looked to see whom she had seen. Alas! there was no room for mistake. It was Fitzroy. He was sitting immediately opposite, and his clear-cut profile and finely-shaped head seemed to make all the men near him look common. He was distinguished from them no less by the pride of his bearing than by the faultlessness of his attire, and he looked a very perfect

gentleman ; but was he a gentleman in essentials ? Margaret asked herself this question as she looked at him. She looked long and intently, noticing every detail of his appearance, from the impassive expression of his deep-set eyes to the little lock of fair hair which, in spite of close cutting, would wave over his forehead ; and then, suddenly, as the glass shifted in her hand, she caught sight of the Pâsha. She saw him for a moment,—the kindly, rugged face with melancholy blue eyes and long gray moustache under the crimson *tarbûsh*—but as she looked the lights were turned out, and a sudden mist came before her eyes. The violins began to sing, and the wild, suggestive Wagnerian music filled her ears and her senses. She listened to it as if in a dream, and it seemed to her like the revelation of depths in human nature that she had never before sounded.

## CHAPTER XIII

THE Pâsha was perplexed and disappointed. He was troubled about Valda, who seemed to have lost all interest in her life except on the evenings when she could go to the theatre. At first he was delighted that she should find so much interest and enjoyment in it. Margaret went with her, as he had planned, and he thought he had found an innocent relaxation which would be a real pleasure to them both. But after a very few evenings Valda gave up taking Margaret. The little Djemâl-ed-Din was troublesome about going to bed when he was left in the charge of the slaves, and Valda made this an excuse for leaving Margaret behind. The Pâsha was obliged to accept it, and to let his wife go with her friend Hamîda Hânem instead ; but he did not like it. It was not what he had intended, and as he saw Valda growing more restless, discontented, and unhappy every day, he became seriously uneasy. He told her that he did not think the excitement could be good for her, she seemed to suffer so much from the reaction, and he suggested that she should give it up ; but at this she burst into a passion of hysterical tears and sobs, and entreated



him not to deprive her of the only amusement she had.

He then spoke to Margaret about it. In the course of an English lesson that he had with her one afternoon when Valda had gone out driving with Hamîda Hânem, he introduced the subject, and asked her opinion upon it. But Margaret was hampered by the recollection of the faith that she owed to Valda, and the Pâsha could get no help from her. She had even more reason to be concerned about Valda than he had, and she was as much disquieted by her growing intimacy with Hamîda as she was pained by her withdrawal of confidence from herself; but she felt that it was a subject on which her lips were sealed in speaking to the Pâsha.

Meantime the weeks were slipping on, and the theatrical season would soon be over; there was that consolation. The great fast of Ramazân was approaching, when, for the space of a whole month, night would be turned into day, and the gates of the palace and the *harim* would be left to stand open from sunset to dawn. For himself, the Pâsha looked forward to this time with no very pleasurable anticipations. He always kept the fast religiously, and from sunrise to sunset he never permitted either food or drink to pass his lips, or the smell of tobacco to assail his nostrils; but he privately detested Ramazân and all its customs. He could not sleep in the day, and he did not care to eat in the night, and thus deprived of his usual amount of rest and food, his health was apt to suffer; he invariably felt wretched, and

he not infrequently became ill. He did not himself find any particular pleasure, either, in the nightly visitings and junketings with which most of the richer folks, who were able to sleep all day, contrived to turn the fast into an occasion of feasting ; but he thought that this might be a distraction for Valda, and if it were to be the means of preventing a reaction from the unwholesome excitement of the last few weeks, he felt that he could look forward to it with equanimity.

In the meantime the Pâsha was busily occupied in pushing forward the arrangements for providing the palace with the electric light on which he had set his heart. During Ramazân the whole household would be upset, and it would be impossible to get satisfactory work out of any Moslem. The workmen, indeed, were all of them Europeans,—French, English, and Italian,—and the fast would not affect them ; but the slaves, who were obliged to attend to their duties in the day after having been up half the night feasting and racketing, were always sleepy and sulky, and they might be counted upon to make things uncomfortable for everybody. It was desirable that the thing should be done before Ramazân, when the lighting of the palace would be especially important ; and the Pâsha pressed on the work by doubling the number of the men who were engaged upon it.

The palace, therefore, was invaded at this time by an army of blue-bloused Christians, who carried their tools and ladders into all parts of the *harim*, and the negroes, whose task it was to watch them, had their hands full. The Circassians, as irre-

sponsible as children, were only kept out of mischief by the vigilance of the negroes, and they found it a glorious opportunity for coquetry; they enjoyed themselves vastly, frisking about where the workmen were engaged, and taking advantage of every happy chance that distracted the attention of the slaves to make play with their eyes round the corners of their veils.

‘Oh, Marmozelle, Marmozelle!’ one of them cried, waylaying Margaret one morning in the ante-room of the dining-saloon, where they were waiting for the arrival of the luncheon from the kitchens at the far end of the garden; ‘oh, Marmozelle, don’t you like the Monsieur with the blue eyes and the long fair moustache?’

‘What Monsieur?’ asked Margaret.

‘The one in the hall outside,—why, you passed him just outside the door on his ladder. Didn’t you notice him, such a very beautiful Monsieur?’

The girls crowded round Margaret, all laughing and talking at once, their bright black eyes sparkling, their comely, fair-complexioned faces beaming under the carelessly arranged handkerchiefs that confined their hair. They were all keenly interested in the matter, even two little girls of eleven and thirteen, who hung smiling and open-mouthed on the outskirts of the group; but Margaret was shocked by their talk. Some of their remarks were highly indecorous, and she was afraid lest they should be overheard and understood.

‘Hush!’ she said authoritatively; ‘it is very horrid of you even to think of such things, *pek*

*fënnah*, *choc fënnah* (very bad, most bad); but to speak about them, and so loud,—how can you tell that the man may not have some knowledge of Turkish?’

‘*Häir, effen, häir!* (No, madam, no!)’ the girls all shook their heads regretfully; such a contingency as that was not likely; they evidently thought it too good to be possible.

Margaret stepped to the open doorway of the ante-chamber to observe the interesting workman, on whom she had not bestowed even a passing glance on her way in. He was indeed very near the door. Perched half-way up the ladder, he was busily engaged in fastening little bell-glasses on to the electric wires twisted in among the cut-glass drops and pendants of the old-fashioned lustre. He was a tall man in the usual workman’s suit of blue calico with wide, flapping trousers and a loosely-fitting blouse, and he seemed satisfactorily intent upon his work. His cap was well pulled forward over his eyes, and his head discreetly turned away,—for a very good reason; Captain Fitzroy was not at all anxious to be recognised by Miss Grey.

Margaret hardly saw his face at all; but she observed that he was soberly and steadily going on with his work, and that he paid no sort of attention to the Circassians, who crowded out after her, laughing and chattering, and peeping at him through their veils, and she was satisfied. She went back into the inner room without the faintest suspicion in her mind as to his identity, and though she tried to repress the foolish talk of the girls, it

was not because she was afraid of his understanding their nonsense that she did it.

‘Oh, Marmozelle!’ cried Zuhra, a pretty little brunette with immense dark eyes and a soft peach-bloom on her cheeks, who was the most audacious of them all; ‘how I envy you and Valda Hânem! The *harîm* is finished now, and there are only the *selâmlek* corridors left to do; we shall see these delightful strangers no more, but you and Valda Hânem pass through the corridors every day, and you can see them still. Fancy walking through, and no one to watch you—Ullah, Ullah, Ullah! if I could only have that chance!’

She executed a sort of *pas seul* as she spoke, finishing up with the most fantastic of pirouettes, and Margaret perceived by the twinkle in her eyes that she was more than half in fun. It was impossible to be angry with her, and yet the delighted laughter with which her sally was received was not to be encouraged.

‘How can you be so silly, Zuhra!’ said Margaret reprovingly. ‘Of course I know that you don’t really mean what you say, or else I should be angry with you. Haven’t you some work that you could do instead of talking nonsense here?’

This was a mild reprimand, but Zuhra was not destined to get off so easily. Old Anâna, who made it her business in life to keep order among the slaves, and did it by a system of spying and dropping upon them at unexpected moments, had been lurking in the dining-room for some time, and now, like a spider out of its hole, she rushed upon her prey, punching and pummeling her with

all her might. She was a vigorous old woman still, in spite of her seventy years, and working herself up with shrill shrieks of rage and vengeance to the fullest exertion of her energies, she slapped and scolded with great effect.

‘Take that, you daughter of a dog! Good-for-nothing offspring of a burnt donkey, here you stand idling all the day long, while your betters are forced to attend to the table. You leave the salad-dishes to stand empty, while you waste your time with unprofitable conversation,—God blacken your face for it!’

Poor Zuhra began to cry,—Anâna was beating and abusing her so unmercifully that it was no wonder—but all the other slaves went off into fits of laughter, and the room was in an uproar when the negroes came in with the dinner-trays and joined their cracked voices to the fray. ‘She is the most troublesome of them all,’ said the big Soudanese, giving Zuhra, as she escaped from Anâna, a rough push that thrust her against the dresser; ‘she gives us more work than all the others put together, Allah reward her!’

It was such scenes as this that formed the reverse side to the light and careless existence of the slaves, and Margaret could not look on at them without disgust and disapproval. Anâna had not said a word of blame about the levity of the girl’s remarks, and she had passed over in silence many much worse speeches from the others. The torrent of her wrath had been poured upon Zuhra only because she was in a bad temper at the moment, and wanted a convenient object to vent it upon.

Margaret was sorry for the poor girl when she saw her waiting at table with red eyes and a sulky face ; and she was more than ever indignant when the old great-grandmother, who sat at the head of the table, noticed the girl's expression and began to persecute her further.

'Ah!' she said, with an indescribable sound between a snarl and a growl, 'you have been offending again, have you, and Anâna has been correcting you? Serve you right, idle pig that you are! What do you mean by that scowling face? Stop crying directly, I tell you!'

'*Pêkeh, Êffenden,*' murmured Zuhra submissively, and dashing away the tears that had risen afresh to her eyes, she hastened to hand to the old lady one of the side-dishes of raw turnips and salt and water which had got her into trouble.

'What has she been doing now, Anâna?' inquired the relentless old woman, plunging her jewelled fingers into the brine, and fishing out a plateful of the sliced turnips.

Anâna, on account of her great age and the confidential position she held in the family, was privileged to sit at the bottom of the ladies' table, and she had a special bowl and horn-spoon of her own that she liked to use through all the courses. She pretended to be entirely absorbed in her basin now, and stuffed her mouth so full of *pilau* that her answer was unintelligible. To do her justice, she was not ill-natured after her fury had once subsided, and she considered that Zuhra had been punished enough for one day without coming in for a rating from the *biûgue Ana*. This old lady, the

big mother, or grandmother, as she was called, was the mother of Valda's mother, and therefore the great-grandmother of the little Djemâl-ed-Din. She was a savage old thing, of repulsive habits and violent temper ; and she was always growling and snarling at everybody who came near her, from her daughter and granddaughter down to the unfortunate slave whose duty it was especially to attend upon her. She seemed to have some grievance against every member of the household, and the ladies had fallen into the habit of receiving her scoldings in respectful silence as a necessary evil that had to be endured. Margaret was often surprised by the patience and forbearance that they showed ; but the Turks are brought up to pay great respect to their parents, and the privileges that are conceded to old age form a remarkable feature in their domestic life. This cross-grained and tyrannical old woman, who was over eighty years of age, and had no position in the house except that of a mother-in-law a generation removed, was given precedence over everybody else, and was allowed to domineer and interfere as if her will were law. Her daughter was the only person who ever ventured to stand up to her, and it was she who now interposed to check her in her attack upon Zuhra.

'I beg of you to leave the girl alone, Effên', she said rather peevishly. 'Zuhra is my slave, and I don't wish her to be made to cry until she won't be able to see out of her eyes to finish the gown that she is sewing for me. No doubt Anâna has corrected her enough for whatever she has done amiss, and it is a waste of breath to go over it all



again ; besides, I am not at all well to-day, and I cannot bear to hear scolding going on,—the noise affects my head.'

The lady had indeed got her head tied up in the white bandage which was worn in the *harîm* as a sort of outward and visible sign of indisposition. Whatever ailment the ladies might be suffering from, the first thing that they invariably did was to swathe their heads with bandages ; and they might be seen going about groaning, with their hands pressed to their waists in a manner indicating no other affliction than indigestion, yet with their foreheads bound up all the same.

One of those feverish colds, which are so difficult to avoid in Egypt, was running through the *harîm* ; the ladies were feeling so miserable and ill with it that they were unusually cross ; and the meal, which was generally cheerful and gay enough, was decidedly dismal that day.

Valda had not appeared with her head tied up ; but she was looking very ill, and she was obliged to admit that she had perhaps got a touch of fever. Her face was very pale, and her beautiful deep-set eyes had such dark rings round them that they needed no additional pencilling to add to their brilliancy. Margaret observed her looks with concern, and begged her to be careful not to run any risks. 'There is such a cold wind blowing to-day, you ought not to think of crossing the garden to return to the other side,' she said at the end of the meal. 'Will you not come through the *selâmlek* with me ?'

'Perhaps it would be well,' Valda answered ;

‘but I cannot come just yet. My mother wishes me to remain with her for a little time. Would you mind going yourself through the garden, and leaving the keys with me? Then I can come with one of the slaves when I am ready.’

Margaret, who had no cold and was not afraid of the wind, made no objection, and giving up the keys to Valda, she went at once to the other side in order to get Djemâl-ed-Din off to sleep before his mother should arrive. Unfortunately the little rascal was in a naughty mood that afternoon, and the united efforts of Margaret and Ayôosha were of no avail with him. When Valda came, he was howling and kicking upon the sofa in a state of furious rebellion, and nothing would do but that his mother should come and sing to him with her lute. Valda was looking as white as death, and she was so weary that she could hardly stand; but she turned a deaf ear to Margaret’s entreaties that she would go and lie down, and signing to Ayôosha to bring her the lute, she sank down upon a low stool in the middle of the floor, and began to play. It was a curious deep-toned instrument, called an *aood*, that she used—something like a very big mandoline with strings of gut, and it made a wild droning accompaniment to a melancholy tune of about five notes, which was the only recipe for sending Djemâl-ed-Din to sleep when he was in a perverse mood. To-day it was a task that required the hard labour of three people. Valda sat crouching upon the floor, patiently singing and thrumming, Margaret waved a big *senâclie* (fly-scarer) to keep the flies off, and

Ayôosha, on her knees, kneaded the springs of the sofa to rock the child until the perspiration poured down her face ; and still, at the end of an hour, the rebellious little bare legs were cocked up in the air in defiance of coverlets, and the great brown eyes were wide open, fixed with a wakeful stare upon his mother's pale face.

'*Kûchuk Âna*,' he said, interrupting the music suddenly.

'Yes, *Bêy-jim*, what do you want.'

'You know that I am to be a soldier like *Pâsha bâbba* (Papa Pâsha) ?'

'*Evet, Bêy-jim* (yes, Bey dear).'

'I shall fight for my country.'

'My little Djemâl-ed-Din ! Of course you will.'

'It was for that that I was born ; and if I am killed on the field of battle I shall go straight to the Paradise of Djinna.'

'You will, my son.'

'I want a red coat with epaulettes, and a belt for my sword, like the English Captain I saw galloping in front of his men at the Kasr-el-Nil barracks.'

'*Pêkeh, Effen*'. *Pâsha bâbba* shall bring them for you next time he goes into town ; only go to sleep now.'

'Shut your eyes, Djemâl darling,' Margaret said to him in English. 'Poor Mother is singing to put you to sleep, and she is getting so tired.'

The child gave one grave glance at his mother, a long, loving look that seemed meant to assure her of his affection, and then he closed his eyes

obediently. In five minutes his golden curls were at rest upon the pillow ; he was asleep, and Valda's crooning, which had been growing fainter and fainter, died into silence.

Margaret handed the *senâclie* to Ayôosha, whose duty it was to watch by the child while he slept, and turning to Valda, tried to persuade her to go and lie down in her room. 'I rather want to go out to see a friend in the town this afternoon,' she said in a whisper ; 'she has asked me to come to tea. You don't think you will want me for a couple of hours ?'

'Oh no,' said Valda at once ; 'go, and stay as long as you like. But it is very hot out of doors just now ; you had better take a carriage if it is far to go. Ask Manetîna to get you one.'

Margaret stole out of the room, her spirits raised by the kind consideration which had spared her a hot and exhausting walk, and she hoped that Valda, left to herself, would get the rest she so badly needed. But Valda was miserably restless, and no longer inclined to sleep. She sat still for a moment after Margaret had left the room, and then, leaving Ayôosha in charge of Djemâl-ed-Din, she passed out into the long workroom adjoining the boudoir, where the slaves were generally to be found gathered together in groups upon the floor, singing and chattering over their sewing. This afternoon, however, they were all engaged in laundry-work in the spacious offices down-stairs, and the room looked deserted and empty. Valda went to one of the four long windows, and, resting her head upon her hands,

looked out into the glowing garden below. She was desperately unhappy, and the worst of it was that she could not tell why she should be. Life seemed to her worthless, and the precepts of resignation which had supported her for so long under its trials had suddenly lost their force and become senseless, like the mocking figments of a false philosophy. Yet she was conscious that the fault must somehow lie in herself, and she tried with all the force of her will to stifle and forget the vague misery of longing that surged up in her heart.

‘What does it matter whether I am happy or not?’ she asked herself. ‘In a few years it will all be over, and then what difference will it make to me or to anybody else? I shall have done my duty to my husband and my country, and shall have left behind me a son who will perhaps be as great a soldier as his grandfather was before him. My little Djemâl-ed-Din! He thinks of nothing but war and battles already, and if he becomes a great general, and upholds the falling fortunes of his country, then I shall not have lived in vain. My life may bring me little joy, but without me the spirit and genius of my father could not have been transmitted to another generation, and who knows what a difference they may not make to the cause of Turkey and of Islam? Let me be content, and not think of myself at all. Can I not find something to do for others?’

Valda turned away from the window with a restless impulse to escape from the solitude in which she felt unable to repress the thoughts that

assailed her. There was a quantity of fine sewing to be done which was beyond the powers of the slaves, and Valda, who was an accomplished needle-woman, was accustomed to give a good deal of time to it. She took it up now ; but she could not settle to it ; she could not sit still and sew in the silent and deserted rooms ; she must have somebody to speak to.

The Pâsha was out ; he had gone with a party of friends to Ghesireh, his favourite resort in the afternoon ; and he would not be back till late. Mademoiselle would also be out for some hours, no doubt, and Djemâl was asleep. There was nobody in this wing of the palace ; but on the other side was her mother, feverish and fretting with a cold. Valda bethought herself of a cooling drink that she knew how to make, and she resolved to prepare it and send it to her mother. For cooking and nursing Valda had a faculty that amounted to genius, and she had found by experience that there was nothing that could so effectually distract her mind from dwelling upon itself as some occupation of this congenial kind. She was busy over her spirit-lamp for the next half-hour, and when her operations were completed she felt comparatively happy and contented.

‘This is really good,’ she said, her face brightening, as she tasted it ; ‘I will pour it into my silver flask and send it to her at once. I know she would like it, and she will be so pleased that I made it. I should like to take it myself, only I am afraid of crossing the garden with my cold——’ She glanced out of the window, and

saw that the wind was blowing about the great india-rubber trees more wildly than ever. Then she remembered that she could go through the *selâmlek*; she had forgotten to restore the keys to Mademoiselle, and they were hanging from her waistband now. 'I came through with Sacêda before; why shouldn't I go back with her?' she thought. 'I will call to her to come with me.'

She took up the flask of curiously-wrought silver which held the sherbet she had made, and throwing a large pale blue shawl over her head, she went out into the corridor. When she reached the staircase door at the end of it, she passed out on to the top-landing and clapped her hands energetically. There were no bells in the palace, and the clapping of hands was generally such an effectual summons that the need of them was not felt; but for once the slaves did not hear,—either they were chattering more loudly than usual, or the high wind in the trees drowned the sound.

Valda clapped in vain. It was very draughty on the wide stone stairs, and she was afraid of lingering there. She went on to the door of the *selâmlek*, hastily resolving to go through by herself; yet she hesitated before she opened it. She had never been into that abode of men without a companion before, and she was rather afraid of venturing. Then she told herself that she had never yet seen a creature whenever she had been through, except Mâuheddin Bey, and him only once when the Pâsha had been with her. The corridor was empty and deserted, it was always empty and deserted, and it was most unlikely that

she should happen to meet any one in the few seconds it would take her to run through it.

‘Bah ! Why should I be afraid ?’ she thought. ‘I have got my shawl, and if I do meet poor old Môuheddin, he will only run like a hare.’

She unlocked the door, and glanced in. It smelt close and unaired, as it always did, but there was not a sign of anybody to be seen. ‘Piff!’ said Valda, and she went in.



## CHAPTER XIV

HENRY FITZROY was a true Briton in one respect. He thought the English language immeasurably superior to any other tongue that was spoken upon earth ; and at the bottom of his heart was a deeply-rooted conviction that anyone who could not speak it was sunk in depths of deplorable, if not contemptible ignorance. But he differed from the average Englishman in possessing a considerable aptitude for picking up foreign languages himself. Able not only to read and understand French, German, and Italian, he could also express himself in them with very fair fluency ; and it was to his proficiency in this respect that he owed his high post in the Khedivial court, and many other advantages which had accrued to him in the course of his career. But never in all his experience had he felt so much inclined to congratulate himself upon his linguistic attainments as on that day in the *harim*, when a smattering of Turkish enabled him to make out what steps would be requisite for the attainment of the object for which he was there.

He had effected his entrance into those sacred precincts by very simple means. An acquaintance

with the managing electrician, and a brief holiday from his duties at the court while the Khedive was on a visit to his palace of Ras-el-Tin at Alexandria, had been his opportunity, and he had known how to turn them to account. He knew something of electricity and mechanics, and he trusted to chance to afford him the meeting that he so ardently desired ; but he had entered upon the adventure without the least notion how he was going to carry it out, and he had been for some days in the palace in his workman's disguise without getting any nearer to his object. Once, in the distance, he had caught sight of a slight figure in sweeping rose-coloured draperies whose graceful movements had caused his heart to beat fast ; he thought it might be Valda, but all the ladies had their heads very carefully covered up in shawls or thick veils, and the fleeting glimpse that he got was only enough to give rise to tantalising conjectures.

From the chance remarks made by the slaves in his hearing, however, he learnt something certain. Valda Hânem, when she came to this part of the palace, was accustomed to pass through the corridor of the *selâmlek*, and she came unattended. There, then, he must take up his post, if possible alone ; and if he could see her close it would be strange if he could not contrive to find some means of making her aware of his identity.

The moment he had finished the piece of work he was engaged upon, he suggested to the superintendent that perhaps he had better get things ready in the *selâmlek* for the workmen who

were to go there next day ; and here fortune played into his hands. With all his natural gifts, and with all the pains he had taken to pick up some knowledge of his assumed trade, he was still an unskilled workman, and the superintendent, who was not in his secret, was disgusted by his blunders.

‘I want this job finished first,’ he said roughly ; ‘but you are a hindering rather than helping. Go to the *selâmlek* by all means ; you can carry the wires there, and you can take the glasses down and clean them. That is the only sort of work that you are really fit for, it seems to me.’

Fitzroy seemed to take his snub in a submissive spirit ; but he went off full of inward elation. The big Soudanese showed him the way through the passages, and unlocked the door for him, but he did not favour him with his company for long. As soon as Fitzroy had settled down to the tedious task of cleaning the lustre-glasses, Manetîнна, whose vigilance was required in more important places than the *selâmlek*, announced that he should lock him in for a time, and come back to release him when his task was done.

‘How long will you be?’ inquired the fellow in Arabic ; ‘an hour?’

‘Oh, much longer,’ replied Fitzroy quickly. ‘Two hours, three ; it will be a long job, it will take me until it is dark.’

Manetîнна grinned sardonically, and shrugged his shoulders with an expression of lordly compassion as he looked at this poor devil of a Christian who was compelled to earn his livelihood by manual

labour. He himself wore a frock-coat of the finest black broad-cloth over a petticoat of spotless white linen, which descended almost to the ankles of his elastic-sided patent-leather boots ; he wore a handsome gold signet ring on the little finger of his broad black hand, and a heavy gold watch and chain, while gold studs and sleeve-links adorned his shining shirt-front and cuffs. Manetîнна was, in his own estimation, a very grand person indeed, and he dressed in accordance with his position. He treated the workmen under his surveillance with a condescending good-nature that was only tempered with severity when a female form came by ; and with this workman, who seemed to know a few words of Arabic, he would have stopped to converse if he had received any encouragement, but Fitzroy was careful not to give it. He had his own reasons for wishing to be alone, and he heard Manetîнна depart and turn the key in the lock behind him with feelings of unmitigated satisfaction.

Fitzroy was alone in the great empty vestibule, and the doors at either end of it (the one communicating with the *harîm*, the other with the *selâmlek*) were securely locked. He could not let himself out, or do anything that would further his object ; but there was just the chance that Valda might happen to pass through while he was there, and his heart beat high with anticipation.

‘Of course some slave will be with her, or else that horrid English girl,’ he reflected ; ‘I would rather have any one but her, for I know I may count upon her to do her best to circumvent me.

Never mind, I think I can be a match for her if I can only get speech of the lady.'

He left the glass ornaments in a heap on the floor, and began to pace restlessly up and down. It was a gray, sunless day, and in the untempered light from the six long windows looking into the courtyard, the great empty place, with its bare floor and uncovered walls of white and gold, looked indescribably forlorn and desolate. Here and there, on a level with the eye, were pencilled scribblings in Arabic characters that the idle attendants of some by-gone *levée* had left for a record of their littleness, and Fitzroy stopped in his walk to try to decipher them. They were not interesting; except for the picturesqueness of the characters they differed in nothing from the effusions of the ordinary cockney tourist, and Fitzroy was soon weary of this occupation. As the afternoon wore on he began to find the time interminably long, till at last he took to cleaning his glasses vigorously in order to find some distraction from his thoughts. Once or twice, hearing the sound of footsteps and voices echoing on the *selâmlék* side, he started up in eager expectation; but they were men's voices, and men's heavy footsteps passing from the outer staircase to their rooms in the *selâmlék*, and no one came round the corner as far as the door leading into the empty wing.

Fitzroy finished one set of glasses, and began on another; but by this time the afternoon had begun to close in, and his hopes were sinking. She was not coming; no doubt she would not come until the dinner-hour, which would not

be until after he had left the palace. What a fool he had been to suppose he could possibly break down the barriers that hemmed her in on every side ; he had better not have come ; it was a useless risk to have incurred. He lingered in the embrasure of a great oriel window jutting out to the west, and looked out over the wide court beneath to the horizon, where the sun, breaking through the clouds that had obscured it all day, was setting in glory behind the amethystine hills of the desert. He had almost made up his mind to give up the quest, and leave the palace, not to return, when he heard a sound that made him turn round with a start.

Valda's light footsteps had been inaudible on the strip of carpet in the corridor of the *selâmlek*, but when she reached the door she had some difficulty in unlocking it, and the key grated loudly as it turned in the lock. Fitzroy waited in breathless suspense till the door opened and Valda came in. He could see her perfectly as she paused to lock the door after her, and he was struck by her resemblance to a beautiful picture of the Madonna that he had somewhere seen. She was dressed in her loose, flowing morning-gown of rose-coloured flannel, and a beam of the setting sun fell full on her gold-brown hair. The blue shawl that she had thrown about her head had slipped down to her shoulders in her struggles with the key, and in the jealous security of the vestibule she did not trouble to replace it. She did not perceive the blue-smocked workman in the recess of the window, and she was advancing quietly along the middle of

the hall when he came forward and placed himself in her way.

‘Permit me, Madame, to restore to you this jewel,’ he said in rapid, well-chosen French. ‘I was resolved that I would give it back to you with my own hand, and now I have found the opportunity. You may not remember me, but you will recognise your own diamonds.’

She did remember him ; she recognised him in an instant, and he saw that she did. The light was full in his face, and on the star that flashed in his hand, and she stood looking at him with a wide, bewildered gaze. She made no attempt to cover her head or turn away ; she did not shriek or start ; she stood without voice or movement, as if petrified by some overwhelming emotion. Then all at once she gave a strange little cry, and, covering her face with her hands, sank in a heap on the ground at Fitzroy’s feet. The last ray of the setting sun shone in upon them,—on Fitzroy, in his blue workman’s suit, standing as if stunned with surprise, on Valda’s bowed figure crouching half hidden in her draperies, on the splendid star of flashing diamonds, and on the squalid scrawls that vulgarised the bare white wall behind.

Fitzroy was frightened, as much by the violence of the emotions of his own heart as by the spectacle of the figure at his feet. Valda’s nerveless fingers had refused to hold the star that he had placed in her hand, and it had fallen on to the floor, where it lay sparkling in the dust. What had he done ? What was to be the consequence of his rash act ? He dared not speak, he dared not move, and least

of all did he feel as if he dared stretch out a hand to raise up that prostrate figure.

It was Valda who moved first. She stirred a little, and he involuntarily stooped to help her as she stumbled to her feet ; but she recoiled from his hand.

‘Oh, Monsieur,’ she gasped, leaning against the wall for support, ‘you ought never to have come into this house ! How did you get in ?’

‘I wanted to see you, Madame. Forgive me for causing you such a shock ; I never meant to do that, but I have been trying to see you for weeks, and I could not find the chance till this one offered. I understand something of mechanics, and I asked a friend who is concerned in this contract to let me in as a workman——’

‘A friend ? Ah, *mon Dieu* ! You have someone else in the secret, you have spoken about it to your friends ?’ Valda’s eyes were wide with alarm, and she locked her hands with a gesture of despair.

‘Not to a single soul, not one word about you. I merely said to my friend that I had a desire to visit the interior of a *harim* before returning to England, and as I shall be leaving soon, he made no difficulty about gratifying my whim.’

‘You are leaving this country, Monsieur ?’ said Valda hurriedly.

‘Yes, I am leaving, and I am not coming back. I am recalled to England by family matters which will probably keep me there, and I am obliged to give up my appointment here. In a month’s time I shall be gone, but before I left I felt that I must



see you once again. I hope I have not done wrong? I saw that your English friend was opposed to it, but I think she does not like me. She is prejudiced against me; but I thought that perhaps you,—I hope I have not been so unfortunate as to offend you, Madame?’

‘No,’ said Valda faintly, ‘you have not offended me; but oh, Monsieur, I fear that you have done wrong in seeking this interview. You have certainly done a very dangerous thing, and I am doing wrong in staying to speak with you. Yet I cannot forget that I am a mother, and that it is you who have saved for me the life of my child; my little Djemâl-ed-Din is my only one, and if I lost him I should have nothing on earth to make me care to live. I should be an ungrateful woman if I were not glad to see you, and glad to be able to thank you for myself. I thank you, Monsieur, from my heart, and you may believe me that you will always be remembered by me.’

Her beautiful eyes were raised to his face, and the expression in them, which said so much more than her words, stirred him more fiercely than all that had gone before. She was not angry with him; on the contrary, there was a confession in her eyes that seemed to mean,—what did that pleading look mean? He had to make a great effort to restrain the impulse to seize and press to his lips the white hand that she held out to him.

‘Do not thank me,’ he said hastily; ‘it was a little thing that I did, and for you I would have done much more. If you will only forgive me for the fright I gave you just now! I know I ought

not to have done it, but I was desperate. You cannot know what it is to me to see you again, and to hear you speak so kindly. Ever since that afternoon, when first I saw you, I have thought only of you. Your face has been continually before my eyes like the mirage of a reality which it is a matter of life and death to reach. I have looked for you everywhere, but I could never see you nor come near you.'

Valda looked at him as if she could not take her eyes away, and she listened as if under some sort of fascination. 'I have seen you,' she said almost involuntarily, 'I have seen you often.'

'You have!' exclaimed Fitzroy eagerly. 'Where? Tell me where?'

Valda was recovering from the shock of surprise and fear, and the self-possession and presence of mind that seldom failed her in an emergency were returning to her aid. She was about to reply, when she was startled afresh by the sound of footsteps in the *selâmlek*, and she remembered the peril of the position. 'Someone is coming!' she said in a hurried whisper. 'I must go!'

But the footsteps were not coming from the direction of the *harîm*; they came from the corridor round the corner, and died away down the outside staircase.

'It is only one of the men going out of the *selâmlek*,' said Fitzroy reassuringly. 'Ah, do not hurry away; I may never be able to see you again.'

'That is true,' said Valda with a sigh; 'but the risk is too terrible. For myself I am not afraid; no one can do me any harm; but for you,

—your life would not be safe if this became known. If one of the negroes were to come in and see you !’

‘The doors are safely locked,’ said Fitzroy, ‘and the man who has the keys is not likely to come for a good half-hour yet. But if anybody should come, we should hear him approaching, and you would have time to slip out at the other end.’

‘The head negro has got the Pâsha’s keys,’ said Valda : ‘he must have borrowed them in order to be able to let you in ; but if mine were in the lock on this side he would not be able to get his in. Then, while he was fumbling and trying to find out what the obstruction was, I should have time to get away.’

She said this more in contemplation of a possibility than in suggestion of a plan, but Fitzroy saw at once that the idea, though simple, was a brilliant one, and he hastened to carry it into effect. He took the keys from Valda’s hand, and made both doors secure. When he came back he picked up the diamond ornament which Valda had left lying on the floor, and followed her into the bay of the oriel with it.

‘No, no, Monsieur,’ she said as he offered it to her, ‘I do not wish to have it back. Did not Mademoiselle tell you? My little boy gave it to you, and I should like you to keep it. Will you not accept it, Monsieur, from him and from me, to remind you sometimes of us? The brooch is nothing ; but I should like to think that when you are far away you will have something that will prevent you from forgetting us altogether.’

‘I shall never forget you,—there is no danger of that!’ said Fitzroy with sudden passion. ‘I need no *souvenir* to make me remember you ; still, if you would give me something,—a glove or a ribbon,—something that you have worn or used, I should treasure it as my most valued possession. Your diamonds I cannot accept. Miss Grey did tell me of your generous intention ; but I told her that it was impossible for me to take advantage of it. No, Madame, do not think that you owe me any debt that needs to be repaid by money or diamonds. The thanks you have given me are enough ; they are more than enough, and I shall never cease to bless the fortunate chance that made me the person to earn them.’

Valda saw that he was determined not to take the jewel, and she did not urge him further. Her wistful gaze fell from his face to the folds of her blue shawl, which she had again drawn round her head, and she mechanically tried to pass the long pin of the ornament in and out of the meshes.

‘Will you not tell me where it is that you have seen me?’ Fitzroy asked, as she did not speak. ‘Is it possible that you felt enough interest,—did you take the trouble to look out for me?’

Valda raised her eyes for an instant, and the mounting colour in her cheek told its own tale. ‘I have seen you when I have been out driving,’ she answered, ‘at Ghesireh, at Giseh, and in town,—but oftenest at the theatre. Every night, when you have been there, I have seen you from my box.’

‘You have been to the theatre? You are in

the habit of going there ?' he exclaimed in surprise. 'Oh, to the covered boxes, of course ; I never thought of that.'

'No, you never looked up to that side, I have noticed ; but you look very often to the other side, and you go to visit the ladies in their boxes. I think there are several charming young European ladies in whom you are interested.'

Fitzroy smiled, enchanted by this little touch of the eternal feminine. 'Do you think so,' he said. 'Well, would you like to know what I think of them in comparison to you ?'

'No, no, no, oh no ! Do not mistake me ; it makes no difference to me what you think,—of them, of me, of anybody. Do you not see ? You are standing close to me, and yet you are very far away. There is a deep, deep gulf between us, and it can never be crossed. I see it clearly, but I will not look across ; it is better not to do it.'

She stretched out her hands as she spoke with an intensely dramatic gesture that seemed to keep him off at arm's length ; but there were tears in her eyes, and she drew back a pace or two into the recess of the window, and turned her face away in order to hide them. Fitzroy did not speak or move ; he stood as if under an interdict, and Valda stared through her tears at the rosy lights in the west. The sun had sunk behind the hills, but the colours in the sky were growing more glorious every instant, and the graceful minaret of a little white mosque close by, and the still more graceful palm-tree that grew near it, stood out against the pink and golden distance and the opaline reaches

of the Nile. It was the same sunset scene that Valda had looked upon with Margaret Grey, when she had said that there was no romance, nor any possibility of it in her life. How short a time ago she had said that, and now she could never say it again ! The unexpected, the impossible had happened ; it had come to her, the romance of her life, and she lingered, knowing only too well how soon it would be over.

‘ Ah, Madame,’ said Fitzroy, breaking the silence suddenly as he became aware of her emotion, ‘ there are some lines in English that I believe in,—

Stone walls do not a prison make,  
Nor iron bars a cage.

Tell me which is the box that you occupy when you go to the theatre ?’

‘ It is the third from the stage, the one next to the two which are reserved for the Vice-reine,’ said Valda turning towards him. ‘ But why do you wish to know ? Through that thickness of iron you can see nothing.’

‘ No, yet I like to know where you are. And you are there every night that there is a performance ?’

‘ Most nights, but there are not many left now,’ she said with a sigh. ‘ The season comes to an end in a week’s time, and then comes Ramazân, when one sees nothing more of Europeans.’

‘ There will be a grand masquerade night at the opera at the end of the season ; shall you be there ?’

‘I don’t know. Perhaps the box will have to be especially engaged for that, and I do not know if the Pâsha will be willing. He does not like my going to the theatre, and he will be glad when it comes to an end.’

It was the first time that the Pâsha’s name had come up between them, and Fitzroy’s brows darkened at the thought of him. He had no more acquaintance with the domestic life of a Turkish Pâsha than the vague impressions that remained to him from his boyish readings of *The Arabian Nights*, and his imagination conjured up a picture strangely distorted from the truth,—a beautiful, helpless woman made the slave and toy of a sensual tyrant whose jealousy grudged her even the few simple pleasures that her prison-life allowed.

‘Tell me,’ he said abruptly, ‘is he unkind to you? Does he make you unhappy?’

‘Who,—the Pâsha?’ asked Valda with widely-opened eyes. ‘Oh no, no, indeed! He is very good to me; he does everything in his power to make me happy.’

‘But you are not happy,—you do not love him?’

It was a question that Fitzroy had no right to ask, and Valda would have done well to be angry with him; but she was looking at him as he spoke, and she saw a look in his eyes that shook her to the soul. The words had escaped from him involuntarily, and they betrayed the passionate rebellion of his love. She stood for a moment breathless and speechless, almost overpowered by the realisation of the intensity of the passion that

encompassed her; her beautiful face quivered and flushed, but her eyes did not fall, and in their wonderful depths, as she gazed silently into his, were revealed the purity and loyalty of her heart.

‘My husband is a good man,’ she said firmly, ‘and if I am not happy it is my fault, not his. He loves me, and he has not deserved that I should deceive him. I will not do it, and this is the last time that you must see me; we must never meet again.’

It was an impregnable position; Fitzroy saw that, and yet he would not give in. A sentence so inexorable he felt he could not accept.

‘Ah, Monsieur,’ Valda cried, as she felt the significance of his silence, ‘you must not seek to see me! For your own sake I implore you. It might bring trouble on me, but the danger to you would be far greater. Already you have run a terrible risk in coming to this house in a disguise; I cannot endure to think what might happen if you were found out. You must never do such a thing again; promise me that you will not!’

Fitzroy did not answer; but in the iron determination of his face and the desperation of his eyes as they seemed to devour her features, she read the strength of the feeling she had to oppose. He had said very little, the questions he had asked had been almost matter of fact; he had made no passionate appeals or protestations like the heroes she had seen at the theatre; he was as impassive and self-contained as the best-bred Osmanli. Englishmen were like this, no doubt; but the



strength of character indicated by his reserve made Valda tremble the more. 'I beg of you, I implore you!' she said desperately. 'Oh, Monsieur, if you will not desist for your own sake, for mine you must. It would kill me if anything were to happen to you on my account.'

'If you tell me that, if you tell me that you care for me,' said Fitzroy quickly, 'I will dare anything, venture anything; there is no obstacle that I should not know how to overcome. Oh, Valda, do you indeed care for me?'

He tried to take her hand, but she snatched it away, and to his astonishment and consternation, she caught hold of his in both of hers, and pressed it to her lips. Her kisses and her tears rained down upon his hand together, and Fitzroy, thrilled to the heart by the shock of it, lost the last vestige of self-control that remained to him. 'Valda, Valda,' he cried passionately, 'you are my love, my queen, the only woman I ever loved,—come to me!'

He would have caught her into his arms, but she drew herself away. 'No, Monsieur, my love is not so selfish as that. God forgive me for the wrong I have done already,—worse I will not do. Now I leave you, and may Allah protect and defend you, for my love cannot. Adieu!'

'Valda, Valda! Don't leave me like this, without any hope to look forward to,—you must not,—you shall not,' cried Fitzroy; but Valda had flown away from him, and was already half-way down the corridor towards the *harim* door. He dared not pursue her, but when he saw her

stop short, and raise her hand with a gesture of alarm, he hastened to her side.

Heavy footsteps could be plainly heard coming along the corridor of the *selâmlek*. 'It is Mane-tînna, the head negro,' said Valda in a rapid whisper. 'I know his step, and he will be here in an instant; but do not open to him until I am safely out at the other end, and you have heard me lock the door. Tell him that you found the key upon the floor, and tried to see if it would fit. I can speak about it afterwards, and say that I think I must have dropped it this morning.'

Valda gave these brief directions in a few seconds, and then flew swiftly and noiselessly along the carpet to the other end of the hall. By the time that the negro had got to the first door she had reached the further one, and the noise she made in turning the lock was unheard by Mane-tînna as he fumbled over the difficulties that his key encountered.

Fitzroy remained in his place in the middle of the hall until he heard the sound of Valda's key being withdrawn from the lock; but by that time the negro had discovered that something was wrong, and he was beginning to curse volubly in Arabic.

'What is the meaning of this? What evil deed have you been hatching, dog of an unbeliever?' he burst out furiously as soon as Fitzroy let him in. 'A key,—you have got a key! Where did you get it from?'

'I picked it up from the floor' replied Fitzroy, reflecting that the explanation suggested by Valda, though delusive, had the merit of being true so far

as it went. 'I put it into the door to try if it would fit. There was no harm in that.'

'Yes, but why did you leave it locked? Answer me that, you dog!' replied the slave, his suspicions only half appeased.

'Let me advise you to wag your tongue a little more civilly in speaking to honest workmen,' said Fitzroy coolly. 'Of course I locked the door to secure myself against the entrance of any of the ladies of the *harim* who might happen to be prying about. Those Circassian slaves of yours have been running after me all day long, and I have no desire to get into trouble on their account.'

Manetîнна grunted. He was by no means taken in by this explanation, but the unblushing effrontery of it staggered him for a moment, and then he reflected that if there had been any mischief afoot it would hardly be to his interest to bring it to light. For whatever had happened he would be held accountable, and whether he were really to blame or not he would be made the scapegoat. He passed over the matter without further demonstration, therefore, and contented himself with a satirical comment upon the amount of work that the unbeliever had contrived to get through in the course of the afternoon. 'By the beard of the Prophet, thou art an honest man. Wallahi! Haste is of the Devil,—so it is written—but thine is a neck to be beaten with shoes. When thy master cometh in the morning to see what thou hast accomplished, may I be there to witness thy reward. Go, and may God speed thee on thy way to Gehannum!'

With this doubtful benediction the negro conducted his charge to the great gloomy hall in the basement of the palace, where the other workmen were already collected, shouldering their tools and making ready for departure. Fitzroy went out with the rest of the blue smocks, but when they returned in the morning he was no longer in their ranks. The pious aspirations of Manetîna were not destined to be gratified.

## CHAPTER XV

VALDA was careful not to give Margaret the slightest hint of her interview with Captain Fitzroy; but her manner and the evident excitement under which she was labouring convinced the English girl that something fresh had happened, and a chance discovery soon confirmed her suspicions.

One evening Margaret had occasion to go to the little cabinet in which Valda kept her jewels and nick-nacks. Djemâl-ed-Din had been even more difficult to manage than usual, and before going to sleep had clamoured so persistently for sweets that Margaret, to pacify him, promised to go and look for some in his mother's room. Valda (who as usual was at the theatre with Hamîda) was accustomed to keep a little store of Turkish Delight and other sweets for the boy's benefit, and Margaret went to the porcelain vase in which she knew that she would find some.

She stood under the electric light in Valda's bedroom before the open doors of the cabinet, and on the shelf before her eyes was the vase that she wanted; but it was not this that she saw first. On another shelf were the jewels that Valda was accustomed to wear every day, and among them was

the diamond star which had been lost at Ghesireh. Margaret recognised it at once, and she stood aghast at the sight. How had it come there? Captain Fitzroy had declared his intention of restoring the jewel with his own hand; had he managed to do so? Had he seen her, or had he sent it? Margaret ran over in her mind every possible contingency, but of course she did not think of the right one, and the conclusion that she came to was that Hamîda Hânem might have had something to do with it. Margaret, even more than the Pâsha, disliked and dreaded Valda's intimacy with Hamîda, and she had all along been afraid of the increased influence that was the inevitable result of those frequent evenings at the theatre. Valda would sooner or later confide her secret to Hamîda, if she had not done so already; of that Margaret felt certain, and with that hand in the business, what might not come of it? This new discovery made Margaret more uneasy than ever, and she longed to put the Pâsha on his guard; yet there was nothing definite to go upon, and remembering how solemnly Valda had warned her of the consequences of any such communication, she was withheld by a dread of precipitating a catastrophe. Valda must know him better than she could, and if it had been a difficult story to tell at first it would be worse now; how much worse Margaret did not know. She resolved, then, to say nothing to the Pâsha, and to take the earliest opportunity of speaking to Valda herself. Something must be done to prevent her from being left to the guidance of

Hamîda in what might be the most critical moment of her life.

The next morning she found her opportunity. Valda, in the pink morning-gown that every day seemed to accentuate more the waxen whiteness of her complexion, came out at about ten o'clock into the sunny garden, and with a languid smile of greeting to Margaret, sank down by her side on the cushions by the orange-trees.

'*Bon jour, Madame,*' said Margaret cheerfully. 'Did you enjoy yourself at the theatre last night ; was it a good play ?'

'Oh, I don't know. It was opera, and I never care for that much ; perhaps you, who understand the music, would have liked it. I am so sorry not to be able to take you oftener, Mademoiselle. It seems a shame—but my poor little Djemâl-ed-Din—how can I leave him to the slaves who manage him so badly ? Was he good last night ?'

'Fairly,' said Margaret. 'He wanted some sweets, and the slaves told him that there were none, because they did not like to go and look in your cabinet ; and then he cried a good deal.'

'Lazy creatures !' exclaimed Valda with indignation. 'Why could they not go and look ?'

'Well, I saw that they were speaking without knowing, and Djemâl-ed-Din did not believe them ; so I went myself and brought him some, and after that he went to sleep quite happily.'

'You did right, Mademoiselle, quite right. That is what is such a comfort to me ; when you are there I know that my poor little one will not be thwarted and made unhappy unnecessarily.'

‘But, Hânem, when I was looking in the cabinet for the sweets I saw what surprised me greatly ; I saw the diamond star that you lost at Ghesireh. It caught my eye among the other jewels, and I could not mistake it. How have you got it back?’

Valda did not start, or show any signs of confusion when Margaret mentioned her discovery ; but the colour stole slowly back into her cheeks as she turned and looked at her. ‘Yes,’ she said calmly, ‘I have got my star back.’

‘But how? Who brought it to you? Oh, Valda, have you seen Captain Fitzroy?’

Valda looked away among the shrubberies with a strange smile on her face. ‘I have seen him often,’ she said with composure. ‘I see him sometimes when I go out driving, and sometimes at the theatre, and in imagination I see him always.’

‘But you have not met him—you have not seen him to speak to? Surely it was not he himself who gave you back the jewel?’

Margaret spoke with deliberate earnestness, and the anxiety in her voice and face was so manifest as to take away all suspicion of impertinence from the question. Valda repressed an impulse to snub her, and the denial that rose next to her lips became impossible under the sweet and loving gaze of the gray eyes so anxiously fixed upon her.

‘Yes,’ she said slowly, ‘I have seen and spoken with him, and it was he who gave me back my star ; but do not ask how it happened, or where. It is enough that it is all over, and that it will



never happen again. Once, once in my life, I have known what makes it worth while to have lived ; but it will never come again. Oh, dear Mademoiselle, you may well pity me. Indeed, I am very unhappy !' Her tears fell fast as she reached out her hand to Margaret, and felt it taken in a warm and sympathetic clasp ; and Margaret had tears in her eyes too, but she had no comfort to give. ' You have known what it is, I am sure, Mademoiselle,' said Valda between her sobs ; ' you also have been parted by a cruel fate from some one whom you loved and who loved you.'

' No,' said Margaret honestly, ' I have had no experience of that kind. Nobody whom I could care for has ever cared for me in that sort of way.'

' Oh, Mademoiselle, is that possible ? You, who are so good and charming, so amiable and sympathetic ! The Pâsha thinks there is no one like you, and you have travelled about so much, and must have met so many nice men,—how can it be ?'

' I don't know,' said Margaret with a frankness that it was impossible to doubt. ' That sort of thing has never come my way, and I don't suppose it ever will. There are a great many women among us in these days who miss the lot that they were meant for, who must miss it ; and perhaps our freedom is not really so desirable as it seems to you. But never mind about me. If only this misfortune had not happened to you !'

Valda dried her eyes quickly, and looked at

her companion with a sudden change of expression. It was a misfortune, certainly, that had happened to her, and yet,—would she have wished to have gone without it? She felt that she would not; but she said nothing, for she realised that Margaret, sympathetic though she was, could not understand her feeling. ‘It was not my fault that it happened,’ she said gently; ‘and this last meeting was not my doing or my seeking either. It came upon me by surprise, and without my consent; I should like you to know that, Mademoiselle.’

‘I am sure that you would never lend yourself to any sort of scheme or intrigue,’ said Margaret warmly. ‘It is Captain Fitzroy’s designs that I am afraid of. He has not many scruples, I am convinced.’

‘Indeed, Mademoiselle, you misjudge him,’ said Valda earnestly. ‘He does not mean evil; I am sure of it, I can read his face. He liked me, and he wished to see me again; that was only natural when he did not realise the danger of it.’

‘But he has been two years in Egypt, and he ought to know. Besides I told him.’

‘He considers that you are prejudiced against him; he thought so that day, and he was angry with you. That only made him more determined; but now he has seen me, and he has given me back the jewel. He would give it back, though I wished him to keep it, and it is all over. I told him that he must never see me again.’

‘And do you think that he will not try?’

‘I don’t know,—I hope not,’ said Valda faintly.

‘He is a dangerous man,’ said Margaret. ‘He may mean no harm, but he is infatuated and reckless, and he will stop at nothing to gain his own way.’

‘Oh, Mademoiselle, you are prejudiced against him indeed! I am convinced that he has a good character. He is not only good, he is noble. He resembles the chevalier of the story of the Knights and the Saracens you told me once; he is a perfect gentleman.’

Margaret was silent. To her, Captain Fitzroy seemed a poor sort of paladin, and in her own mind she compared him unfavourably with the paynim Pâsha, whose rival he was; but she knew that argument was useless.

‘You don’t know of anything against him, Mademoiselle?’ Valda said suddenly.

‘No; I know nothing about him. I am only judging him by his conduct in this matter; but that is enough to make me distrust him. I am afraid of him, I am afraid,—oh, Valda, it was not through Hamîda Hânem that you met him?’

‘No; she had nothing to do with it. He contrived it entirely himself, without help from me or any of my friends.’

‘Then does Hamîda know nothing about it?’ Margaret asked eagerly; but her heart sank as she saw Valda’s face.

‘Yes, she knows. How could she help it, when she went out so much with me? She noticed that I was always looking out for him, and she found out. Then she questioned me.’

‘And did you tell her everything? Oh, not

that last meeting,—you surely did not tell her about that ?’

‘I could not help it, Mademoiselle. I was in such a state of mind that evening, I was nearly mad. And Hamîda is very shrewd ; if I had not told her she would have guessed. Perhaps she might even have imagined that it was something worse than the truth.’

‘I do not trust Hamîda Hânem,’ said Margaret. ‘She would not be a good person to advise you in a difficulty. Remember that her principles are very different from yours.’

‘They are indeed !’ said Valda. ‘She was not in the least shocked or surprised at the story I told her. She seemed to think it an amusing joke, and she said it did not matter at all so long as the Pâsha did not get to hear it ; that, she admitted, would really be a serious thing. But do not distress yourself, Mademoiselle ; there is not much time left for any mischief to happen in. He is going away from Egypt.’

‘Who ? Captain Fitzroy ? He is leaving Egypt ?’

‘Yes,’ answered Valda, her eyes filling with tears. ‘He told me that he was returning to England, and that he was never coming back any more. Before the end of Ramazân he will be gone. Ah, Mademoiselle, you will be glad, but I——’

Valda broke down altogether at this point, and fearful lest her agitation should betray her to the slave who was looking after the little boy close by, she rose up and went quickly into the house.

Margaret could scarcely have disguised the relief and satisfaction afforded her by the news of Captain Fitzroy's approaching departure, and she was thankful to be left to herself to think it over. This news was the one gleam of hope and comfort left to her, but it was not enough to reassure her. It was clear that Valda had been able to gain no promise from Fitzroy that he would not attempt to see her again, and if he was going away soon, the shortness of time would only make him the more desperate and determined. Margaret thought over the matter all day, and she came to the conclusion that it was her duty to interpose. 'He does not know what he is doing,' she thought; 'he does not realise the danger and cruelty of it, and it is necessary that the matter should be put strongly before him. I will make one more attempt to check him, and then, at least, I shall be able to feel that I have done my best.'

In accordance with this resolution, Margaret wrote a note to Captain Fitzroy asking him to meet her on the following afternoon in the Esbêkiah gardens. She said nothing about it to Valda, and when Djemâl-ed-Din had been coaxed off to sleep, she mentioned that she was going out into the town, and Valda raised no objection.

The place of meeting was one of the little wooden bridges over the artificial water in the middle of the park, and Margaret was there punctually to her time; but no one else was in sight. At that early hour of the afternoon the heat was intense, and the park was almost deserted. The plants, tropical though many of them were,

drooped in the fiery sunshine, and the ground was like hot iron under foot. The air was full of dust, and not even the syringes playing over the grass could make it green.

Margaret waited for nearly half an hour, leaning over the railings of the rustic bridge, and watching the ducks paddling about in the water. She was beginning to think that her appeal had been made in vain, when, looking up, she saw Captain Fitzroy's tall figure coming across the grass towards her. Her heart beat fast as she watched his approach, and she made a desperate resolution to be conciliatory and tactful, and to manage better than she had done before; but she thought, when he came up, that he looked alarmingly stiff and uncompromising, and his face did not relax into a smile as he returned her nervous greeting.

'You asked me to meet you here?' he said abruptly. 'Have you a message from Valda Hânem?'

'No,' said Margaret; 'it was without her knowledge that I wrote to you; she does not know that I am here.'

'Oh, really,' said Fitzroy quietly, and his eyebrows went up with a slightly supercilious lift that gave his face a very different expression from any Valda had ever seen upon it. 'Then what is it you can have to say to me?'

'I want to tell you something about her, something that I am sure you do not realise. Captain Fitzroy, please do not think me spiteful and intrusive; it is only because I care so much

for Valda that I am so anxious upon her account. I cannot bear to see her life spoilt, and I am sure if you knew the circumstances as I do, you would be willing to make any sacrifice rather than be the cause of it.' Margaret paused, but Fitzroy made no remark to help her. He stood stiff and straight, listening politely, but with an impassive face, and she went on desperately. 'Valda tells me that you are going away soon. Is that true?'

For an instant Fitzroy looked disturbed. 'She told you that? Has she told you——' he broke off suddenly, but Margaret could supply the hiatus.

'She has told me of her last meeting with you. I saw the star, and she said you had returned it to her yourself. She hopes now that it is all over, and that there is no fear that you will compromise her further.'

'She hopes that—ah, I see! That is your interpretation, Miss Grey. Of course you see things from your point of view; but if I am not much mistaken, it is a different one from Valda's, and I think I may safely make some reservations in accepting your statements.'

He stood and looked at her with undisguised hostility. There was between them that silent antagonism which sometimes forms such a hopeless gulf between natures of contrasting qualities and destinies, a feeling of contempt and repulsion on both sides that there is no repressing. Margaret had no envy or bitterness in her composition; she was too genuinely humble-minded and unselfish to feel any resentment at the inequalities of life; but there was something in Captain Fitzroy, in the

pride of his splendid physique and assured position, which irritated her ; and despising him, as she did, for the want of any stern stuff in his character to work upon, she could hardly endure the thinly-veiled expression of his contempt. She had qualities that he was incapable of comprehending, and she was perhaps equally unable to appreciate the good points of his character.

‘Is it true that you are going to leave Egypt soon?’ she asked, making a valiant effort to put her own feelings aside, and to think only of Valda’s interests.

‘Yes,’ he replied ; ‘I expect I shall be leaving in less than a month now.’

‘Then there is a chance left for Valda. When you are gone she may be able to get over this, and settle down again, though I suppose she can never be as happy again as she has been. Captain Fitzroy, this is what I wanted to tell you—Valda’s health is being destroyed. You may take my statement with what reservations you choose ; I shall at least have done my duty in putting the truth before you. She is ill ; her health and happiness are both breaking down under this strain. If it goes on it will end in a tragedy of some sort, and the responsibility of it will lie at your door.’

‘She is ill—her health is breaking down—what do you mean?’ demanded Fitzroy, now thoroughly startled.

‘I will tell you everything ; I think you ought to know,’ said Margaret firmly. ‘Valda is not like an English girl ; her passionate Eastern nature is not one to be lightly played with. Before you



came she was not happy, but she was not unhappy either—at least she knew no cause why she should be. She was fond of her husband in her own way, and he was devoted to her. She had her child, whom she adored, and no lack of occupation and amusement to fill up her daily life. There was only the natural melancholy of her disposition to throw any cloud over the peaceful tranquillity of her existence. Then came that accident that threw you in her way.'

'Yes—then?' said Fitzroy intently, as Margaret paused.

'That was the beginning of mischief. The circumstances were extraordinary; you saved her little boy's life, and you saw her, and looked at her, as no man save her husband had ever looked at her before. It was not wonderful that it should have made a deep impression upon her. Still that might have faded—she might have forgotten it if nothing had occurred to renew it—but you would not suffer that. You insisted that you would see her, and therefore the thought of you was kept continually in her mind. You managed to secure a meeting; what you said or did I do not know, but since then—since then——'

'What have you seen since then?' asked Fitzroy pressingly. His voice shook with some suppressed emotion; what was it? Regret, fear, or was it joy? Margaret wondered as she looked at him, and a pang of misgiving assailed her; was she giving him an assurance that he wanted, was he waiting to learn from her the certainty that Valda loved him?

‘Since then she has been miserable,’ she exclaimed passionately. ‘If you wanted to make her suffer, you have done it ; her worst enemy could not have blighted her life more effectually. She has suffered cruelly, and all her pleasure in life is gone. Her one chance now lies in your speedy departure, and I have come here to-day to appeal to you not to try to see her again before you go. I implore you to have pity upon her, and to refrain from working further havoc in her happiness.’

Fitzroy was silent, but his face was flushed and his eyes shining. He was desperately in love with Valda, and now he heard the confirmation of what he knew already, but had hardly dared to believe, that she loved him also. She loved him, she loved him ! What did anything matter in comparison with this great reality ? What were the remonstrances of this girl but the commonplace croakings of an envious and narrow mind ? He did not heed them, he did not listen to them.

‘You mean to see her again—I know you do,’ said Margaret, who was watching his face ; ‘and Valda believes it also, though she tries to think that she does not. But I warn you that no good will come of it. You will make her suffer : you may bring discovery upon her and the anger of her husband, who would never forgive her, however innocent she might be ; but you will gain nothing. Valda will never forget what she owes to her husband and to her family, and you can only bring to her pain and grief and desolation.’

Margaret had made her last appeal, and it was received in silence. She could not guess from

Fitzroy's set face how deeply he was stirred, nor how near to yielding he was brought. She thought him detestable ; but he was in reality very far from being a detestable character, and his faults lay more in the drawbacks of his qualities than in any inclination to vice. He had a high sense of honour, and his disposition was naturally so generous that at any other time he could not have withstood an appeal to respect a woman's weakness ; but now he was in the grip of the fiercest emotion that can take possession of the heart of man, and years of prosperity and self-indulgence had sapped the strength that might have enabled him to fight against it. He looked at Margaret's pale, refined face with aversion, almost with detestation, and consciously allowing his mind to be diverted from the real point at issue, he decided against her appeal on the ground of the distaste with which she inspired him. She was a little prig, a little middle-class piece of respectability, and she did not know in the least what she was talking about. She had no experience of the world or of society, and was he to be guided by her pragmatism and offensive notions of propriety ? He knew now that Valda loved him, and he must see her once again before he left the country. It was a very slender privilege to ask, and it was one that would be denied to no man in any civilised society ; he would not relinquish the hope of it to satisfy the prejudices of this meddlesome and intolerable girl.

The sound of a clock striking four somewhere close by reminded Margaret that her time was limited, and seeing that further remonstrance was

useless, she drew down her veil, and moved to go. 'Good-bye ; I see I have done no good,' she said miserably ; but Fitzroy accompanied her on her way towards the gate of the park.

'I don't know what good you expected to do,' he said as he walked beside her ; 'but you may believe me when I tell you that no expostulations are necessary to keep me from doing anything to injure the person whom I love best in the world. I know that there is nothing to be gained by it,' he went on, allowing some of the strong emotion which he felt to find an outlet ; 'but I cannot cut myself off from the hope of seeing her once more should the opportunity come in my way. I cannot believe that she would wish to deny me that, or that it could do her any harm. I promise you, however, that I will do nothing that can expose her to any possible risk.'

'Risk ! Who that has secret dealings can possibly avoid risk ? In a crooked path there are turns and surprises that cannot be reckoned upon, and any moment may bring you face to face with discovery and exposure. I believe—— ah !'

Margaret broke off short in the middle of her sentence, as an illustration of the truth that she was trying to express forced itself suddenly upon her. Who would have thought of seeing the Pâsha walking in the Esbêkiah gardens at this hour ? Yet, as Margaret raised her eyes, she saw him there in his gray tweed suit and crimson fez,—unmistakably the Pâsha ! He stood at the turn of the walk, about a hundred paces away, where there was a cross cut through the park, and Margaret stopped

short, hoping that he might pass by without looking up the side path along which she and Fitzroy were walking. But the Pâsha's blue eyes were very keen-sighted, and not only did he see her, but he observed the signs of confusion and dismay that were betrayed on her countenance. A gleam of amusement flashed across his face ; then in an instant he became grave, and, bowing ceremoniously, he shot a keen glance at her companion and walked on.

'Who is that?' inquired Fitzroy quickly, as Margaret stood pale and discomposed, looking after the departing figure of the Pâsha.

'It was the Pâsha,' she answered ; 'yes, her husband. You have not seen him before?'

'Yes, I have seen him. I must have seen him often among the other Pâshas at the *levées*, for I know his face quite well, but I did not know who he was.'

'He is the kindest and gentlest of men, and Turk and Paynim though he is, I am sure there is no husband in Cairo who is more devoted to his wife,' said Margaret, with a sudden break in her voice. 'He worships Valda, and if he knew what is going on I believe it would break his heart. No, Captain Fitzroy, do not come any further with me. There is nothing to be gained by prolonging this interview, and risks are not so easy to avoid as you seem to imagine.'

Margaret had failed in her mission, and she went away with a very bitter consciousness of it. It seemed a pity, but if she had been a less high principled and conscientious person than she was, she would probably have had a better chance of suc-

ceeding. The sense of her superior goodness irritated Fitzroy ; it made him feel worse than he naturally was, and he hardened himself in his resolution against her. In his pocket he had a note (not the first that he had received) from Hamîda Hânem, offering to arrange a meeting at the masked ball at the Opera House, to which she was going with Valda. He had not yet sent an answer ; but as he parted from Margaret his fingers sought the little piece of paper and closed vigorously upon it. He did not intend to sacrifice this chance.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE Pâsha believed that he had made a discovery. Mademoiselle, who was so quiet and retiring, had her own attractions, and she had found an admirer. She was so reserved that she would no doubt have kept it a secret, but the Pâsha had taken her by surprise, and the expression of overwhelming confusion he had seen in her face seemed to him an unmistakable indication of the state of affairs. He was deeply interested, and benevolently sympathetic, but he was also inquisitive, and he could not resist the temptation to tease that the occasion seemed to offer; he only waited for the end of his English lesson the next afternoon to begin.

‘I hope I have not kept you too long, Mademoiselle,’ he said politely, as he shut up the book. ‘I have not been in the way of your keeping an appointment at Esbêkiah, *par exemple*?’

Margaret’s heart seemed suddenly to stop beating, and her cheeks flushed a dark red. She said nothing, and the Pâsha’s eyes twinkled as he looked at her.

‘Did I not see you in the gardens yesterday?’ he asked mischievously. ‘And you were not alone, *ma foi*! you were in very gallant and distinguished

company. Who was the gentleman, Mademoiselle,—is it permitted to ask?’

Margaret murmured something indistinct—she scarcely knew what—about a mere acquaintance.

‘*Mais mon Dieu*, Mademoiselle,’ exclaimed the Pâsha laughing, ‘you have no cause to blush for him. He is a most honourable and distinguished person. Was it not Fitzroy Bey?’

‘Do you know him, Excellency?’ asked Margaret with a start.

‘Oh yes, I know him,—not personally, of course, but by sight. He occupies a high post in the service of the Khedive, and one hears a good deal about him at the Court.’

‘Do you? And what sort of a reputation do you think he bears?’ Margaret asked anxiously.

The Pâsha laughed mischievously. ‘Aha, Mademoiselle, you are interested in him, you cannot conceal it! You would not be so much concerned to know about a mere acquaintance. And, *mon Dieu*, why not?’ he added indulgently, as he saw the painful colour mount again almost up to her eyes. ‘He is very handsome, and has every quality to attract a woman; I am sure I do not wonder. He is clever, too, and he speaks foreign languages much better than most of his countrymen. I know that Lord Cromer thinks highly of his judgment, and he seems to have considerable influence with the Khedive. But he is leaving the service and going back to England; did you know that?’

‘Yes, I knew it; he told me. He will be leaving Egypt in a few weeks.’

‘It is a pity,’ observed the Pâsha with a benign-



nant smile. 'There will be an attraction the less for you in this country, and perhaps it will not be so easy for us to persuade you to remain?'

'Oh no, Pâsha, no indeed! I assure you that you are mistaken; you were never more mistaken in your life. Captain Fitzroy is nothing to me, and I need no inducement to make me wish to stay on with you. I am perfectly content here.'

'You are content, you are, really? Well, I am glad if it is so,' said the Pâsha kindly. 'I am sure we don't want to lose you, though, of course, if you thought of marrying, Valda would be the last person to wish to stand in the way of your happiness. I have been afraid that you might have been finding your life rather dreary and monotonous lately. You enjoyed going to the theatre with Valda, didn't you, but you have been only two or three times, I think? I regret so much that she always takes Hamîda Hânem with her now.'

'It is over now,' said Margaret; 'last night was the end of the season, wasn't it?'

'Yes, but there is something to-night, a *bal masqué*, I believe. The French community here are getting it up for some charitable fund, and I was asked to take a box. I refused, because I did not want Valda to go. It does not seem to me that this play-going has been beneficial to her, and I do not care for her to be so much with Hamîda; but it seems that she has set her heart upon it. I tried to dissuade her, but she would not listen to me, and after you left us last night we came nearer to a quarrel than we have ever been before.'

'And is she going to-night then?'

‘Of course she is. Do I ever refuse her anything on which she has set her heart? I had to go out this morning and pay double to secure her the box that she wanted. This is what it is to be a Turkish husband! Now tell me, Mademoiselle, are Englishmen more complaisant?’

‘I don’t know,—not many of them I fancy. But you are too good——’ Margaret checked her laugh, and ended with a sigh. ‘However, this is the last night.’

‘Yes; to-morrow will be the first day of our great Fast. As soon as the new moon makes its appearance you will hear the guns of the citadel firing in Ramazân. Bah! it is a wretched time, and for myself, I wish it were over; but I think that all the visiting may be a distraction for Valda.’

‘Will she keep the Fast?’

‘Oh no, I always get an indulgence for her. She and her mother, and the old lady, my mother-in-law’s mother, are not strong enough to fast, and I give fifty piastres a day to our fund for the poor in order to exempt them from the obligation. You will have your meals comfortably with them as usual.’

With this sustaining assurance the Pâsha gathered round him the folds of his voluminous dressing-gown, and went off to his own room. He thanked Margaret for the lesson first, as his courteous custom was, and she managed to force a smile as she met his glance, but the moment that he had left the room her self-command deserted her. Her eyes filled with tears, and she let her hot cheeks sink into her hands.

‘The poor Pâsha, oh, the poor Pâsha! How kind he is, and how unsuspecting! If he knew, if he guessed what had been going on,—but oh, I hope he will never know! It is the last night before Ramazân, the last time that she can see that horrid man, and by the end of the Fast he will be gone.’

The last night, the last night! This was the refrain that was also ringing in Valda’s head all that day. She knew nothing of the appointment made by Hamîda; but she realised that this was the last opportunity that she would have of seeing Fitzroy even from a distance, and she was feverishly anxious not to lose it. She had overcome her husband’s opposition, and that evening she went to Hamîda’s house, and drove in her carriage to the Opera. ‘This once more, this one last time I shall see him,’ she thought, as she entered her box; and while Hamîda was still occupied in taking off her wraps at the back, Valda pressed her face against the iron grating, and looked eagerly out into the brilliant scene below.

He was there. She saw him directly, standing bare-headed and unmasked in the midst of the grotesque and motley throng. There were a good many men present in ordinary evening-dress, who had come merely to look on, among them men of position and standing, whose wives and daughters, in satin and diamonds, were looking down from the open boxes on the left of the theatre; but there was not a single person there, Valda thought, with a proud exultation of heart,

to be compared with Fitzroy in distinction of appearance and bearing.

She looked at him through her opera-glasses, noting every detail about him, from the white flower in his coat to the characteristic wave of his fair hair. He was not dancing; he was not paying any attention to the extraordinary figures that whirled past him; he stood alone and abstracted, glancing up now and then to scan the occupants of the boxes, and occasionally bowing to an acquaintance. In his hand he held a letter; but Valda did not know that, still less could she know whence it came or what it was about. It was that letter, however, that filled his thoughts, and it was the cause of the colour in his cheeks and the light in his eyes. 'She does not know of our plan yet,' Hamîda had written; 'I judged it best to keep it back from her until I have got her safely to the theatre. But do not be afraid; I know how to manage her, and we will join you at supper after the *cotillon*. Only be careful to secure a table in a secluded place, and make the waiters keep away. We shall be in blue dominos embroidered with stars and crescents in white.'

At the back of the theatre, behind the stage occupied by the band, was a wide open space arranged as a restaurant with little tables laid out for supper, and Fitzroy had made all his preparations. The evening was half over already, and at the end of the *cotillon*, which the dancers were now beginning, there would be a short interval for refreshment. It was in this interval that Hamîda had promised to bring Valda down, and

Fitzroy was waiting for it in a turmoil of suspense and anxiety. He stood among the crowd well outside the circle of the dancers, watching with indifference and impatience the various features of the entertainment. Most of the company were French,—very French indeed ; and the little dress-makers and *grisettes* of the town were enjoying themselves royally. The managers of the *cotillon* had been to considerable trouble in devising new features for the distribution of partners, and some of the figures were very pretty and graceful. The last of the series was an amusing one. A large paper-covered screen was brought out into the centre of the arena, and folded round a party of about fifteen or twenty ladies so as to conceal them entirely from view, and then, as the music struck up, their would-be partners, in considerably greater numbers, danced in a ring round the screen. Here and there a little white-gloved hand would be seen, thrust invitingly through the paper, and a small satin slipper would be visible from under the boards at the bottom, but it was all a chance what partner a man would be able to secure when the signal was given for bursting through the screen ; and as the numbers were unequal, the competition was keen and the struggle exciting. Every man who was lucky enough to secure a partner in the *mêlée* waltzed off with her, but those who were unsuccessful had to retire discomfited amid the laughing condolences of the whole assembled company. The figure was a popular one, and had to be repeated many times with fresh screens, until all the ladies who wished to dance

had had their turn ; but Fitzroy, whose interest in it had quickly subsided, and who could not be prevailed upon to join in it, watched impatiently for it to come to an end.

The supply of screens was exhausted at last, and the dancers careered in a wild *galop* for the last time round the arena. The *cotillon* was over, and as the band struck up the strains of the Khedive's March, there was a general move to the top of the room. Fitzroy shouldered his way through the crowd in the opposite direction, and soon found himself near the main entrance at the bottom of the theatre, where he hoped to see two blue dominos make their appearance. He waited in vain for some minutes ; there was a block of people in the doorway, and he could not see a sign of any fresh arrivals.

'Will she come, will she come ?' he asked himself in a fever of anxiety. 'No, she will not, her friend will be unable to persuade her ; she will never consent to it.' Valda had never yet, in the whole course of this strange episode, done anything that implied her sanction to it. She had taken the initiative in no sort of way ; would she be induced to take this, which for a woman in her position was such a very serious and decided step ? Fitzroy scarcely dared to hope for the possibility of it, yet he felt ready to stake everything upon it, and he waited at his post near the door, straining his eyes, and tormenting himself with alternate hopes and fears.

He was beginning to give way to despair, and was moving away from the door, when, through a

parting in the crowd, he heard, in the guttural accents of low-class Parisian French, a speech that arrested his attention.

‘What! A new arrival, at this hour! You are late, my pretty, and you must pay the penalty. Allow me to remove your mask.’

Up to this time the festivities, though lively enough, had been of a perfectly orderly and decorous nature; but as the evening wore on, it was only to be expected that the rougher members of the throng would become more boisterous, and a burst of rude laughter warned Fitzroy that some devilry was going on. He did not guess that it was anything in which he was concerned, but he instinctively pressed forward to interfere, and he came none too soon.

Valda and Hamîda had entered through another door, and they had been searching for him in vain. Valda had been startled by a chance remark made by one of the masks in passing, and her shrinking manner as she clung to Hamîda had drawn upon her the notice of a young madcap who had been prancing about the whole evening, taking all the liberties of the licensed jester whose cap and bells he wore. When Fitzroy came up he was on the point of putting his hand upon the lace of Valda’s black silk mask in order to pull it off, and she uttered a stifled cry of terror as she saw his intention; but before he had time to carry it into effect a strong arm had thrust him aside, and he found himself held fast in a grip like that of a vice.

Fitzroy had recognised the blue domino with a

pattern of white stars and crescents dotted over it, and the sound of Valda's cry for aid sent the blood bounding through all his pulses. He was in a white heat of fury and indignation, but his habit of self-command came to his aid in this critical moment, and enabled him to exercise a restraint which was very necessary. He knew that anything in the form of a scene or a scandal would be fatal to his wishes, as well as dangerous for Valda ; and only in the flash of his eyes and the iron grip of his fingers on the Frenchman's shoulders did he suffer the intensity of his feeling to betray itself.

'Be off with you, you cad, and be thankful that I let you go so easily,' he said, throwing the fellow from him with a twist that made him spin and stagger like a collapsing top. 'If I catch you molesting people any more I will give you in charge to the police.'

Fitzroy spoke in English, and the youth, who was a mere hobble-de-hoy, could not understand a word of what he said ; but the Englishman's superior strength and authority were more forcible arguments than words, and he was completely subdued and overawed. Some of the bystanders raised an ominous murmur as they saw in the spurning of their countryman another instance of outrage by perfidious and usurping Albion. In no quarter of the world does the national antipathy and grudge between French and English betray itself in such intensity as on the disputed soil of Egypt ; and these Frenchmen pressing round, with fierce moustaches projecting from the grotesque masks of bears and foxes and owls that they wore,



were just like a pack of growling curs ready to set upon an enemy whom they feared and hated.

But the tall Englishman, who faced them with his fair hair uncovered and his handsome features unmasked, was unmistakably a person accustomed to command, and he had an air of distinction and authority betokening the high rank and position which was becoming the monopoly of the English in Cairo. The hustling instinct of the crowd was for a moment held in check, and while they hesitated their opportunity was gone. Fitzroy did not wait for a rejoinder to his scornful speech, and the moment he had flung the offender aside he offered his arm to Valda.

‘Out of the way!’ he said imperiously to a couple of youths who stood in front of a group of women a little on one side ; and as they moved off he led the two ladies out of the press.

## CHAPTER XVII

IT was but a slight *contretemps* that had happened, and it was over ; but the effect it produced upon the chief actors in it was serious out of all proportion to its apparent significance. As Fitzroy led Valda up the room, and felt her clinging desperately to his arm, as if yielding herself altogether to his protection, he was in a silent ecstasy of happiness. He looked cool and self - possessed enough, and walked with a firm step and steady face, but inwardly he was in a tumult of emotion, and his sensations were almost too keen for endurance.

‘Do not be frightened,’ he said, bending to speak to Valda in a low voice of such tenderness as only a lover knows how to use ; ‘it was merely a momentary disturbance, and there is no harm done. You are quite safe now, and if I had only known by which door you were coming, I would have been there to protect you from the first. Oh, Valda, Valda darling, it was good of you to come ; I hardly dared to hope you would !’

Valda did not answer, and as he saw that she was too much agitated to be able to speak, he did not press her further. Hamîda Hânem was walk-

ing on the other side of him, and she was very much agitated too, but fright had not deprived her of the power of speech, and the moment that she reached the place of privacy and shelter that Fitzroy had provided, she burst forth into voluble expression of her feelings.

'*Ah, mon Dieu, mon Dieu !*' she cried, flinging her two fat hands into the air, and speaking as fast as her tongue would go, as she plumped herself down upon a chair. 'I thought we were lost, I thought we were certainly lost ! Allah, Allah, Allah ! That was a terrible moment, and if you had not come when you did, Monsieur, I am sure I should have died. I could feel my heart shrinking up into a bouncing ball, and I expected to see it leap out of my mouth every instant. You were expecting us at the other door, I suppose ? I told Valda that it must be so, and so we went to look for you ; but could I have known of the dangers to which we were going to expose ourselves, I should never have ventured to take a single step. Oh, the rude wretches ! Oh, the monsters ! Oh, my heart, my heart, my heart !'

Hamîda pressed both her hands upon that broad region in which she imagined her heart to reside, and threw herself back in the chair until it creaked and groaned under her. But suddenly she saw some one coming in, and sat upright, checking her transports with an exclamation of alarm.

'Allah, Allah, Allah ! Who is this ? A man, —oh, Allah, protect us !'

The room Fitzroy had procured was not really a room at all ; it was only a recess, curtained

off from the rest of the place by his orders. It was the best arrangement that he had been able to contrive at such short notice ; and inside the curtain the little table laid for four, with everything placed ready upon it, so as to obviate the need for attendance, looked very private and snug. The table was laid for four, however, and not for three, for Fitzroy had been quite alive to the necessity of providing some person to entertain Hamîda, if he was to get any satisfaction out of the meeting for himself and Valda. He had therefore invited a friend whom he could trust to join the party, and it was the appearance of this fourth guest within the folds of the curtain that excited Hamîda to a fresh access of agitation.

Fitzroy made haste to explain matters and to introduce his friend, and as soon as Hamîda understood that he was to be her partner in the little *partie carrée*, she showed herself immensely flattered and gratified. She accorded him the most gracious reception, and the gallant officer, who was a stout and worthy Major in the Army of Occupation, and who had never in all the five years of his residence in Cairo enjoyed such a chance as this before, was charmed with the opportunity of becoming acquainted with a Turkish lady of such an appreciative description.

Hamîda was not troubled with the least vestige of shyness, and when the Major showed her that by keeping his ponderous foot upon the edge of the curtain, he could guard her from all risk of intrusion, she acceded with frank and delightful willingness to his suggestion that she should take

off her mask. She was thus enabled to enjoy her supper and to display her charms at one and the same time, and it was a question which advantage she appreciated the most.

Fitzroy had never enjoyed the privilege of beholding her before, and he was thunderstruck by the vision now revealed. Her bad complexion and features were redeemed by a pair of undeniably fine gray eyes, and with the relief of the dark hair which it ought to have had, the face might not have been ill-looking ; but the hair falling over her forehead in a straight and wispy fringe was fair, very fair, with that lifeless appearance which is the effect of unskilful dyeing, and the effect, already startling enough, was rendered worse by an artificial blackening of the eyebrows and lashes. Fitzroy thought that he had never seen anyone so hideous, but the little Major was evidently of a different opinion. He thought her a fine woman, and he was charmed with her attentions to himself. She turned her big gray eyes upon him in a manner which showed that she fully understood their value ; but neither he nor she was at all inclined to forget their supper, and in the intervals of laughing and chattering they managed to make an astonishing impression upon the *pâté-de-foie-gras* set before them.

The Major and Hamîda sat side by side, enjoying themselves amazingly, but for the other two the supper was a pretence. Valda could not be induced to take off her mask for a single instant, or even to lift the lace that bordered it, so as to drink the champagne that Fitzroy pressed

upon her. She had allowed him to put her into a chair next himself in the far corner of the recess, and when he took her hand in a passionate attempt to reassure her, she did not immediately withdraw it ; but she could not say a single word, and she was shaking from head to foot with a nervousness that was like an acute attack of stage-fright.

Hamîda looked up once or twice from her flirtation with the Major to rally Valda upon her silence, and at last she turned with a laugh to her partner : ‘ I think that my friend must be shy on your account, Monsieur ! Supposing, now that we have had our supper, we take a stroll round the room to see what is going on ? Then, when we come back, we may find that matters have improved.’

‘ Hamîda, don’t go ! Hamîda, Hamîda, you must not leave me ! ’ Valda cried, springing up from her chair ; but Hamîda had already slipped on her mask, and heedless of the appeal, was passing out under the curtain that the Major was holding aside for her.

‘ Would you like to go too ? ’ asked Fitzroy considerably. ‘ If you dislike to remain for a few moments under my care——’

‘ Oh no, no, it is not that ! ’ cried Valda, touched by the gentleness of the reproach. ‘ I am not afraid of you, M. Fitzroy, please do not imagine that.’

‘ Well, then, what would you like to do ? You see your friend has gone ; would you like to follow her, or would you prefer to wait for her here ? ’

‘ Oh, I will wait here. I must remain until the

time that she appointed for her attendant to come and fetch us, and I am safer with you than anywhere else in this room. Please forgive me for being so tiresome and disappointing. I am sorry indeed, but, oh, I ought not to have come! I did wrong in listening to Hamîda's persuasions, and I feel it now. I ought never, never to have come!'

'You have received a shock to your nerves through the insolence of that fellow, and you are thoroughly upset,' said Fitzroy. 'It is only natural, but it will pass off if you will take some wine. Drink this,—yes, Valda, you must—I insist upon it,' he said imperatively, handing her a glass of champagne that he had just poured out, and he stood at the entrance to hold the curtain while she took off her mask to drink it. The effect was what he anticipated, and in a few moments she was able to subdue her hysterical sobs. 'You are perfectly secure in here,' he went on, gazing with delight at the beautiful face which was now free from its ugly disguise. 'Your friend will return presently, and I will see that you get safe back into the charge of your attendant without any more adventures. And now tell me, why do you feel that you have done wrong? What harm is there in a meeting like this, which is the last we can ever have? It is little enough for me, only the privilege of seeing you to say good-bye; it would have been too unkind of you to have denied me that.'

'That was what Hamîda said, and I did not know how to resist her,' Valda said falteringly;

‘but something in my heart tells me that I am wrong. If my husband were ever to know of it, what would be his feelings!’

‘You think so much about his feelings,—you care for him then?’ asked Fitzroy quickly.

‘He cares for *me*,’ said Valda simply, and the answer was significant of much.

‘Well, and he has you,’ said Fitzroy with sudden bitterness; ‘he need not grudge me the little I have. I love you more than he does, a thousand times more, and I must go without even the sight of you all my life. Oh, Valda, tell me for my comfort, tell me that I may think about it when I am far away from here and separated from you for ever,—I love you so much, do you care a little for me also?’

Valda was silent. Her eyes were full of tears, but they were bent upon the mask upon her lap, the strings of which her fingers were twisting restlessly. Outside in the theatre there was a Babel of blending sounds; the hum of many voices, the rhythm of dancing feet, the singing of the violins in the music of the waltz. The little curtained recess at the back of the theatre seemed a comparatively quiet and sheltered place, and Valda had recovered from the paralysing effect of her terror; but it had given place to an emotion not less overwhelming.

‘Valda, tell me,—is it nothing to you that this is the last time that you will ever see me? Do you not care in the least what becomes of me?’

Love is apt to be selfish, but when Fitzroy saw the look in Valda’s eyes as she at last lifted them,



he felt some touch of remorse for what he was doing.

‘Why do you ask me what you know,—what you know only too well?’ she said passionately. ‘You know that I love you, that I care for nothing in the world but you; but the gulf that lies between us is impassable,—we can never cross it.’

‘We could if we tried,’ said Fitzroy in low tones which had a strange ring of hope in them.

‘We may not try; I may not, and I will not. No, Monsieur! You will go your own way, and live your life, and I mine. You will return to your own country, and there doubtless you will marry and be happy. You will forget the poor imprisoned Turkish girl for whom you thought you cared, and I,—well, perhaps I may forget too,—I hope that I shall. I shall find oblivion in death, if in no other way.’

The abandonment in her voice was the abandonment of despair, and it was more than Fitzroy could bear; his heart leaped up in revolt against it. ‘You shall not!’ he exclaimed, taking both her hands firmly in his. ‘You shall not suffer as I know you would. Come to me, and I will take care of you; only come with me to England.’

Valda wrenched her hands away from him and rose from her chair. ‘Impossible!’ she said; ‘you do not know what you say.’

‘I do, and I will maintain it. If you love me, it is not impossible; I will manage it, and I will make you happy. Oh, Valda! How happy you would be in that free life in England, and how

much admired ! You would be a queen wherever you went, and there would be no one to compare with you. I would take you everywhere with me, wherever I went you would go, to every sort of pleasure that you liked ; we would go together, and the whole world would envy me for being the husband of its brightest star. Such beauty as yours was not meant to be hidden away in a *harim* ; it was meant to be a light and glory in the world. You would shine, Valda, and you would be happy, —I know you would !’

Valda listened to him with her great eyes fixed in a tragic stare under her sharply-drawn brows. It was a strange picture that she was looking at. Herself in the guise and circumstances of an English lady, going about unveiled, learning what life was. He would let her do that, he would let the whole world of men look upon her and admire her, and he would feel no jealousy. That was freedom, and he would give it to her,—but, ah, she did not want it ! She did not want the admiration of society ; she shrank from the very notion of it. Valda had often pined for liberty. The restraints of her life were galling to her, and she had longed for more freedom, but not for the sake of the admiration that it might bring her. There was singularly little vanity in her disposition, and this appeal to it did not move her. If he admired her, if he loved her, that was all she cared for ; but that, even that, was too much. ‘It is impossible,’ she said hopelessly.

‘It is not impossible. Oh, Valda, let me arrange it ! Listen to me——’

‘No, no, no! I may not. Do you think that a Turkish woman has no feeling of honour? My husband has been good to me, and I have no complaint to bring against him. He would break his heart if I were to throw him off like that, and I cannot do it. Then my little boy,—my little Djemâl-ed-Din—no, no! I am bound by ties that are too strong to be broken,—I am bound, bound, bound fast!’

She flung out her hands with a gesture of despair as she spoke, and the action expressed the strength as well as the weakness of her nature, but Fitzroy was blind to its significance. He caught her hands again and held them fast in a grasp against which she felt herself powerless. ‘If you love me as I love you, there is no tie, no bond that can hold us asunder. I would break any tie, make any sacrifice for your sake, Valda, and what is your husband that he should stand between us? A Turkish Pâsha, who will replace you by the first person whom his relations select for him! He did not choose you, he did not woo you; he married you as he would have married any woman who had been brought to him, had she been as ugly as sin and as wicked as a witch. I do not consider that you are legally bound to him; he is not the true husband that Heaven meant for you. Marry me, Valda, and you shall know what true marriage means.’

Valda was silent, and for an instant Fitzroy thought that she wavered. Then a sudden thought seemed to strike her. ‘Mademoiselle, — what would she say, what would she think? She is a

good woman, and she knows what is right and what is wrong. She would say that it was a sin ; she would think of me as of a wicked woman.'

'Oh, Mademoiselle,' said Fitzroy in deep disgust ; 'you must not be guided by her. She is a bigoted and unreasonable person who is quite ignorant of the ways of the world : she would never be accepted by society in England ; she is no better than a nun, and her opinion is of no value at all ; it counts for nothing.'

But that it did count for something with Valda Fitzroy saw from her face. She thought of Margaret, of her clear and honest eyes, and of the conceptions of right and wrong that she lived up to in all the little details of her daily life ; and the realisation of that standard made her feel, as nothing else could have done, the falsity of the ideal now held up to her.

'Valda, Valda !' Fitzroy exclaimed, getting desperate as he saw his chance slipping from him. 'Why do you hesitate, why do you trouble yourself to think what an insignificant person like that may say ? It does not matter in the least. You love me and I love you, and it is fate that has brought us together. Do not struggle against the decree of destiny, and so spoil both our lives.'

'Destiny is powerful, but God is all-powerful,' said Valda with a shudder. 'God is great, and His curse would be upon me if I did this thing. I dare not do it !'

'What are you afraid of ? You need do nothing,—I will do it, and I will take the whole responsibility of it. With the *harim* gates open

all night long, as Hamîda Hânem tells me they are during the whole of Ramazân, it will be easy enough to manage. You have only to let yourself out through the *selâmlek* to meet me, and then, —then, in a few hours we should be at Ismailîa, on board the boat, and steaming straight for England. Oh, Valda, think of it! You and I together for all our lives, with no one to come between us,—what happiness would be before us!’

‘Not with God’s curse upon us,’ said Valda. ‘Something would happen, some punishment would fall. The ship would be wrecked, or you would be struck down by illness or accident. I should never get to England. I should have received my reward before that, for if anything happened to you, I should have nothing left to do but to wait for the first dark night to throw myself into the sea.’

‘Oh, Valda, this is fantasy, this is superstitious folly!’ cried Fitzroy, his determination gaining strength from her opposition. ‘Surely you are not a coward to be afraid of imaginary dangers?’

‘No, I am not a coward. I am the daughter of long generations of soldiers, and I am afraid of nothing for myself,’ said Valda firmly. ‘Let God’s vengeance fall on me: I should deserve it, and I could endure to suffer myself; but it would not be only on me that it would fall. It would be on my husband, it would be on my little Djemâled-Din, it would be on you. Do not ask me any more, Monsieur. I tell you that it is impossible; we must part.’

‘Yes,—if you decide it so—we must; we must

part immediately, and for ever. In a few minutes your friend will be here, and by the decision you have come to then we shall have to abide. Now the choice lies in your hands, and it is the choice between happiness and misery. Oh, Valda, I implore you for my sake, if not for your own, consider what it is that you are doing. I do not know how to live without you; every chance of happiness will be lost to me, and my life will be made barren. I am leaving the country, and if I leave you behind, I know I shall never see you again. Valda, Valda, say something to give me a little hope,—I beg of you, I implore you, before it is too late—'

But it was already too late. Already Hamîda's step was approaching, and her laugh was audible on the other side of the curtain. Valda snatched up her mask, and with shaking fingers fastened it into its place. She was trembling all over, and her face would have betrayed her to the most casual observer; but it was safely hidden by the time that Hamîda came in, and her curious glance was unable to make anything out of the situation.

'Well!' she said gaily, 'I hope you feel better, Valda? *Ma' sh' Allah!* Have you been in here all the time? It was best for you perhaps, since your nerves had been so shaken, but it is really a pity that you should have missed seeing all the fun. Such spectacles we have seen! But now we must be going. Already we shall be behind our time, and my Nubian, though he is well schooled, has limits to his patience. Oh, well! thank you, M. le Majeur, I think I will have a glass of

champagne, and just a mouthful more of that delicious *pâté*,—just a very little bit——’

‘Hamîda, we must not stay,’ said Valda imperiously ; ‘we must not keep the man waiting. Come at once,—I will not stay,—we have run enough risks.’

Valda was desperate, and Hamîda had to drink off her champagne in a hurry, and leave untouched the plateful of *pâté* to which the Major had helped her.

‘There is no fear,’ she said crossly, as they left the place ; ‘my attendant is a discreet fellow, and he will never play us false. He knows that it would not be to his interest to do so. I am in possession of secrets that he would not like to be known, and therefore I can trust him with mine. We should find him at his post even if we were to be an hour behind our time.’

Her confidence in the man was not misplaced. They found him in the dark archway where he had been ordered to wait, and as soon as he saw his mistress he came forward silently.

Hamîda had gone first with the Major through the boisterous crowd of dancers, and Fitzroy had managed to detain Valda a few steps behind. The evening was at its height, and the theatre was so full that it was not a very easy matter to steer a passage through the crowd, but with Fitzroy to guard her Valda was not afraid. She was weeping silently behind her mask, and she did not say a word as they made their way through the noisy scene ; but as they passed out of the brilliance, and reached the passage where the Major was bowing

his adieux to Hamîda, Valda paused, and held out her hand to Fitzroy. 'Adieu, Monsieur,' she said in a stifled voice; 'may peace go with you and happiness attend you!'

'Peace,' said Fitzroy in a low tone of intense bitterness, 'peace and happiness! No, Valda, they will be far enough from me; you could give them to me, but you will not.'

'I cannot,—ah, forgive me,—indeed I am suffering enough!'

'Remember, M. le Majeur, good-bye in Turkish is *Ah las mâledûc*. Yes, now you say it rightly; that is perfect. And now I must say it in earnest, adieu, adieu! Valda, my dear, are you coming?'

Hamîda had been instructing the Major in Turkish phrases, his pronunciation of which had made her shriek with laughter, and it was a final lesson that gave Fitzroy the opportunity of lingering over his leave-taking; but now it was over and Valda was turning away.

'*Au revoir*, Valda,' he said in a hurried whisper. 'I refuse to give up hope altogether, so it is *au revoir*, not adieu.'

'*Ah las mâledûc, Monsieur!*' said Hamîda.



## CHAPTER XVIII

THE Fast of Ramazân (or Ramadhân, as the Arabs call it in their harsher tongue) is a movable one, and it happened that year to coincide very nearly with the period of Lent, which doubtless served as a model to the imitative mind of Mohammed. Margaret, who went every morning to an early service at the Anglican church, and in the evening witnessed the performance of a Mohammedan service in one of the unused state-rooms of the palace, was unavoidably brought to draw comparisons between the Western and the Oriental forms of faith. She was struck with the religious fervour by which the Mohammedans, young and old, rich and poor, seemed to be animated, and she could not help observing that they kept Ramazân as few Christians are willing to keep Lent. Five times a day, without fail, every man about the place was to be seen at his prayers in the gardens, at the colonnades, and in the ante-rooms of the palace. The ladies of the *harim* and their Circassian slaves were not less devout. Each one had her own particular prayer-carpet and rosary, and with bare feet newly washed, and veiled head turned to the East, would go

through all the complicated ceremonies of devotion for twenty minutes at a time. Margaret watched it all, and was impressed by it ; and yet she felt that there was something wanting, something vitally needful.

Every evening a patriarchal-looking *imâm* (or priest) came to hold in the palace a solemn service at which all the members of the household were present. Between the central hall of the *harîm* and the reception-rooms of the *selâmlek* a door was thrown open, and in a dark ante-chamber behind a curtain the women spread their carpets and followed the devotions of the men.

Margaret was shy of intruding upon them at this time, and she tried to keep Djemâl-ed-Din amused in another room ; but the little fellow was deeply interested in the whole performance, and nothing would do but that he must be there to join in it. He liked to hold Margaret's hand and peep through the curtains at the crowd of male worshippers. '*Pâsha Babba,*' he would murmur appreciatively, pointing out his father in the forefront of the crowd ; '*bac, Mademoiselle, Pâsha Babba !*'

Margaret would look as she was bidden, and very strange it seemed to see the whole company of men, with the dignified *Pâsha* at their head, crouched on the floor, with their heads bowed, and the soles of their slipperless feet upturned. The deep and guttural voice of the *ulêma* (one of the religious elders whose duty it is to read the service) filled the room with a melancholy and monotonous chant ; and as he prayed the whole company of

worshippers, men and women alike, would rise and hold up their palms to heaven, and then prostrate themselves to the ground again, touching their breasts and lips and foreheads.

This salutation, it may be said, is commonly used by inferiors to their superiors in rank, and Margaret had often seen it practised by the slaves of the *harîm*, who came, fresh from the bath and with their clean clothes on, to kiss the hem of their mistress's robe. The Pâsha had explained that it was as much as to say : 'I take up the dust before you, and I devote my heart, my lips, and my head to your service.'

One evening after the worshippers had been listening on their knees to a long reading from the Koran, and when the recitation of prayers, with the litany of obeisance and response, was beginning again, the little Djemâl-ed-Din eluded Margaret's restraining hand, and slipped inside the curtain before she could stop him. He made his way in a moment to the front, and taking up a position on a corner of his father's carpet, began to imitate with solemn gravity all the movements of the Pâsha. When the Pâsha bowed his forehead to the ground Djemâl-ed-Din did the same ; and when he stood up and folded his arms across his breast, the child imitated him as faithfully, though not as simultaneously, as the rest of the company. It was a quaint spectacle, and Margaret, from her peephole behind the curtain, could not help being amused in spite of her trepidation ; but the absurdity of it did not appear to strike anyone else, and when the Pâsha chanced to look behind

him, and caught sight of the golden curls of his little son bobbing in unison with the long tassels of the *tarbûshes* all around, he only smiled reassuringly, and reached out his hand with a kindly caress.

The Pâsha was very strict in his observance of the fast and its obligations, and every afternoon Margaret could hear him chanting aloud from the Koran, to study which he shut himself up in his room for many hours. He did not wish his wife to be exposed to any privations, however, and he was greatly distressed and dismayed when, on the first day of Ramazân, she announced her intention of keeping the fast herself this year.

‘My dear Valda, you must not dream of it,’ he said in shocked remonstrance. ‘It is not for delicate women like yourself, and I would rather pay forty times over than see you subjected to it. Already I am not at all happy about your health ; you have not been yourself for weeks, and you are getting thinner and paler every day.’

Valda said nothing ; she only smiled languidly.

‘Indeed, my dear friend, you will lose your beauty,’ the Pâsha continued ; ‘and instead of fasting I would advise you to do all you can to regain the strength you have lost. You are not fit to starve and pray all day, and then go out visiting in the night, and I implore you not to think of it. Do persuade her, Mademoiselle.’

Margaret, who had quite as strong reasons as the Pâsha for being concerned about Valda’s health, joined her remonstrances to his ; but Valda was impervious to argument and entreaty both. ‘I am

perfectly well,' she said inexorably, 'and I wish to do it, and I will not accept an exemption this year.'

'You have never done it in your life,' said the Pâsha.

'That is all the more reason why I should do it now. I could not do it before. When I was a girl I had my lessons to attend to ; and afterwards, when I was married, you always made excuses for me. There is really nothing that ought to prevent me now.'

'You will certainly break down,' the poor Pâsha said in despair. 'You know it always makes me ill, and if it is too much for me, how much more for you? And why should you object to an exemption this year when you have always had it before?'

'Because I am ashamed of having failed in my duty for so long. I believe in my religion, and therefore I must act up to it,' said Valda firmly. 'I am determined about this, and I can assure you that I will not yield. Do not provoke me by opposing me in my desire, Pâsha-jim ; it would only make us both angry, and it would be of no use in the end.'

Valda, therefore, was among the ladies who kept the fast, and Margaret took her midday meal with no other company than that of the two grandmothers. It was not a comfortable state of things, for both these ladies were extremely cross. Valda's mother was ill, and had no relish for any sort of food ; and the old grand-dame was furious because she was debarred from the excitement of keeping the fast. Both of them vented their ill-temper

upon the slaves, whom they scolded without ceasing through every meal ; and the starving Circassians, to whom the very smell of the food was an offence and an abomination, were so sulky and sleepy that even Margaret found it difficult to get on with them.

In the afternoon most of them spread their mattresses out on the floor and slept ; but towards sunset they were to be seen with their watches in their hands, eagerly disputing about the time, and counting the minutes that must elapse before they could begin to eat. Margaret used to find them in the ante-room of the dining-room, standing round the circular tray from which they took their meals, and waiting, while the golden glow of the sunset behind the palm-trees was deepening into red, until through the open windows the boom of the Turkish cannon could be heard echoing in the still air. Then in a moment they dashed their fingers into the dishes, and snatched up the first bit of bread they could lay hold of.

The sound of the gun brought the ladies flocking in to their dinner from all parts of the *harim*, and as they had to be served before the slaves could settle comfortably to their meal, this eagerness to get a mouthful beforehand was not without excuse. When Ramazân fell in summer the strain was considerable, and after many hours of fasting through days of blazing heat, a slave, who had been unable to get anything to eat before waiting at dinner, would sometimes be overcome by the smell of the food and collapse utterly. This year, however, there was no such strain, and

beyond a little sleepiness and crossness, for which their late hours and unwonted festivities were enough to account, there was nothing amiss with the slaves.

The only person who looked really ill was Valda. She was never in a hurry for the evening meal, for by the time that it arrived she was generally too much exhausted to be able to eat anything. As Ramazân wore on she grew visibly whiter and thinner, and more languid and depressed from day to day, till the Pâsha was seriously troubled by her looks. He did everything he could to dissuade her from carrying out her resolution, but nothing would induce her to give it up. She was changed not only in looks, Margaret thought : there was a new earnestness of purpose in her, a deepened intensity of melancholy, and she threw herself into the exercises of religion with the desperate fervour and self-abandonment of a person who seeks in devotion a safeguard and distraction from some overwhelming trouble.

She went about the *harîm* like a ghost, the mere shadow of herself, and it was with difficulty that she could be prevailed upon to take any part in the nightly junketings and visitings. Her intimacy with Hamîda seemed to have come to an end. She never went to see her now, and she tried to avoid her as much as possible whenever she came to the palace.

‘Do not talk to me about it,’ she said one day, when Hamîda was paying a visit, and had brought up the subject of their escapade at the Opera House ; ‘I told you all that was to be told that

night. It is all over between us, and he will be leaving the country before Ramazân is out. What is the use of thinking about him any more?’

‘Ramazân is more than half over now,’ said Hamîda, ‘and it will be very soon that the Englishman will be leaving. In ten days from now he will be gone.’

‘Ah!’ said Valda with a sudden catch of her breath. ‘Ten days,—it is very soon! But it is well. Soon or late, what does it matter to me? I shall never see him again.’

Hamîda gave a queer glance at the pale face and slender figure by her side on the big, white-sheeted divan. She knew that Fitzroy had no intention of leaving Cairo without seeing Valda again, and she had a letter from him tucked away in the folds of her expansive bodice at that moment. It was addressed to Valda, but for a moment she debated whether she would give it to her. Hamîda was a coarse-minded, pleasure-loving woman, of an essentially vulgar and common nature, and she had no principles at all in her composition; but she had not a bad heart, and she had no inclination to work mischief up to the point of injuring anybody. The enforced seclusion of her life, together with the idleness of her hands and the activity of her brains, had urged her into many a secret adventure when she was young; and now that her charms were waning, and her opportunities for amusement becoming fewer, she was delighted to have an affair of someone else’s to conduct. Perhaps, too, she was not altogether uninfluenced by the satisfaction of seeing Valda, whose superior virtue in



such matters had always annoyed her a little, thus lowered to her own level. Hamîda had been clever enough herself, however, to keep out of any scandal, and she had no desire to let matters go so far as to involve Valda in disaster. She wondered now whether there was any danger lest Valda's infatuation should lead her beyond the limits of caution in that evasion of restraint that she regarded as legitimate under the conditions of their life, and she hesitated for a moment whether to deliver the letter or let the matter drop. But her love of excitement and her curiosity together were too strong for her prudence, and she drew the letter out of her bosom.

'Look, Valda ; he has sent me a letter to give to you. Do you not want to know what is in it ?

Valda looked at the letter with a strange expression in her eyes—was it hope or fear ?—but she made no movement to take it, and after an instant's hesitation, she put up her hand as if to thrust it away. 'No, I do not want to know,' she said hurriedly. 'Put it back in your dress, Hamîda ; I will not receive it. I do not wish to have anything more to do with him.'

'*Allah !* You have quarrelled with him then ! What was the use of doing that when the poor fellow is going away so soon ? You might as well part friends.'

'We have parted, and it is all over. What is the use of beginning again ? I will not do it, Hamîda.'

'*Ma' sh' Allah !*' said Hamîda. 'Of course you must do as you please, but it seems to me that you

are taking the thing much too seriously. If it is no pleasure to you to go on with it, why then, of course, there is no object in giving him any further encouragement ; but he will be desperately disappointed, poor fellow, and why should you deny yourself a little amusement when it comes in your way ? Why not take it simply, and enjoy it while it lasts ? Without some little relaxation of this kind, one's life would be too dull to be endured, and luckily for you, you are still young and pretty, —you may look forward to plenty more admirers in the future.'

'I don't want any,' said Valda passionately. 'All I wish for now is for peace and quiet, that I may do my duty to my husband and my child, and live faithfully in my religion. I have never done Ramazân before, Hamîda, but now I am doing it, and it has changed my ideas. I feel that God is great and we are little, and it does not matter if we suffer so long as we do right. It will soon be over.'

'*Allah, Allah, Allah !*' exclaimed Hamîda in a voice of consternation ; 'you are doing Ramâzan, you are doing it like that ! No wonder you look so ill and weak and miserable ! You will kill yourself, Valda, you look half dead already ; and this melancholy state of mind that you have got into,—a young woman like you to be talking about death and religion,—it is bad, very bad ! But, of course, I could have told you that it would be so ; it is always the result of one's stomach being upset out of its usual habits.'

Valda was silent. She was not without a sense

of humour, and it was often roused by Hamîda's philosophy ; but to-day she was too miserable to be amused by anything.

'This fasting is all very well for strong men,' pursued Hamîda, who had been stirred into a state of strong indignation ; 'but for fragile women like you and me it is an abomination, an absolute abomination ! You ought not to attempt it. What is the Pâsha dreaming of not to pay an exemption for you ?'

Hamîda weighed a good thirteen stone, and she did not look as if a short course of fasting would do her any harm ; but it is one of the little ironies of life, that the discipline and penances that are intended to refine too earthly human nature are carefully avoided by all who need them, while those who will get more harm than benefit from the treatment are eager to embrace it.

Hamîda's arguments made no impression at all upon Valda, and at last she received a pretty plain hint that it was time for her to take her departure 'Would you like to go and see my mother before you leave ?' said Valda wearily. 'I am sorry that I cannot stay with you, but the Pâsha is not well. He is confined to his room on the other side, and I don't like to be long away from him.'

'*Allah !* Has he nobody to attend to him but you ?' asked Hamîda discontentedly. 'A wife is not a slave, with nothing to do but to wait on a man's whims and fancies, I should hope ! There is nothing serious the matter with him, I suppose, only the effect of this wretched Ramazân ?'

'He has caught a chill, I think, and he is very

feverish,' said Valda. 'I hope it is nothing, but you never know what course a chill of that sort may take, and I prefer to do any nursing that is needed myself, for I do not think the slaves are to be trusted. The Pâsha is a good husband to me ; he deserves that I should do what I can for him.'

'Bah ! You are a model wife !' said Hamîda. 'I had been feeling just a little bit nervous as to how far you were going with that Englishman, but I see now that I might have spared myself the pains. You won't look at his letter then ?'

'No,' said Valda shortly.

'Then what am I to do with it ?'

'Return it to him unopened,—mind, Hamîda, unopened—and tell him that I refused to receive it. Tell him that he must not attempt to hold any more communication with me. I am very sorry if it seems unkind, and I do not mean it so, but I think it is better for him and for me.'

'Poor young man, he will be in despair !' said Hamîda. 'But I think you are right. One must draw back some time or other, and soon or late it makes little difference, so long as there is no more fun to be got by going on with it. I will give him your message.'

Hamîda departed, bearing the letter away with her, and Valda left the hall, and pushing open the glass doors that gave upon the garden in the inner court, went slowly down the steps, and through the flowers and sunshine to the darkened room in which her husband lay.

The Pâsha was prostrate, alternately shivering with cold and burning with fever, and he had such

an excruciating headache that he could not endure the light. Quinine and quiet were the only remedies that could do him any good, and he did not really require nursing, as he was quite sensible enough to take these precautions himself; but Valda had a natural instinct for helping and comforting in illness, and her presence, which was a blessing to anybody at such times, was especially a comfort to the Pâsha. He scarcely knew how to endure the moments when she was out of his sight, and his eyes brightened when she came back to him.

‘You have been a long time away, Valda,’ he said, as she knelt by his sofa, and bathed his burning temples with an essence that gave out a fresh invigorating scent. Her beautiful white hands, so cool and tender, seemed able by their touch alone to drive away pain, and the Pâsha gave a sigh of relief as she began.

‘Have I?’ she said softly. ‘Not more than half an hour, I think.’

‘Who was there?’

‘Only Hamîda Hânem, and I sent her away as soon as I could. Your head feels like fire; is it very bad now, Pâsha-jim?’

‘No, it is better now,—praise be to God for His mercies—but I think it is partly because you have come back to me. I really think there is some magic in you, Valda, and you are the sweetest wife a man ever had. It is your own fault if I am exacting in wanting to have you with me. I get impatient if you are only a few minutes away, you see. What should I do without you?’

It was the echo of a thought in Valda's own mind, but she said nothing, and continued her ministrations without looking up.

'It is a blessing indeed when all is dark and stormy without to have a home which is full of happiness and peace,' said the Pâsha wistfully. 'God forgive me if I take too much comfort in it, when my heart would otherwise be bleeding for the misfortunes of my country.'

'What misfortunes?' asked Valda quickly. 'Has anything fresh happened? Has the Sultan——'

'Oh, not worse than before,' answered the Pâsha wearily. 'It is the same old story of bad governors and bad management, and every day brings some additional weight to the burden that the nation has to bear. There have been fresh massacres in Armenia,—an abominable mongrel cur of a court-sycophant, placed in authority as Vali there, conniving at the business, some say contriving it even. The fellow is half an Armenian himself,—but they are the very worst, they have no bowels. An Armenian will sell his own mother for money, and we, we Osmanli, get the credit of their infamies.'

'If the Armenians could all be swept into the sea, it would be well for Turkey and for the earth,' said Valda with flashing eyes.

'Unfortunately it cannot be settled so simply; but things must come to a crisis soon. All the nations are turning against us, and we shall be involved in war before we know it. The Greeks have been insulting us again, and they are only waiting for an excuse to attack us. Let them come! We have more to fear from their lying

and cheating than from their fighting. For my part I should be glad of a war. We want something to call out the good qualities of the nation, and to dissipate the scum of rascality that now overlies everything, and is spreading rottenness and corruption all around.'

'If there were a war you would be recalled, you would fight?' asked Valda, with the blood mounting to her face, and a flash of enthusiasm in her eyes.

'I hope so; indeed, I think there could be no doubt about it. The Sultan would need Turkish generals instead of mongrel courtiers then. You would wish me to go, Valda?'

'Oh yes!' said Valda fervently; 'and I only wish that Djemâl-ed-Din were old enough to go too! If I had ten sons I would wish them all to be soldiers, and if they all fell upon the field of battle I would not grudge their blood, so long as they were able to prove their courage and serve their country.'

'That is the right spirit for a soldier's wife. Why, Valda,' exclaimed the Pâsha, sitting up among his cushions and looking with a smile of admiration at her flushed and excited face, 'this talk about fighting has given you back your colour. You look quite inspired. I believe you would like to be a man, that you might go and fight yourself.'

'God forbid!' said Valda piously. 'The Almighty has made me a woman, and who am I that I should dare to question the wisdom of His decree? No, it is enough for me to know that you will fight bravely and win distinction. My work is to

do my duty at home so that you may be fitted for the strife when it comes. I will nurse you to make you strong for the time when your strength will be needed.'

'I must take care, though, that you don't get ill yourself in looking after me,' the Pâsha said anxiously. 'It grieves me to see you looking so white and languid ; and you are sad and dispirited as you never used to be. It must be your health that is the cause, and when you are so weak it is madness for you to be doing Ramazân. Will you not see a doctor and be guided by his advice?'

'No indeed ; I am all right, thank you, and there is no need for me to have a doctor, Allah be praised ! Do not tease me with threats of doctors, Pâsha-jim.'

The Pâsha was obliged to yield the point, and perhaps he did so with the less misgiving because he was accustomed to the powers of feminine endurance, and knew that its limits were not to be measured by the mind of man. In the days that followed his illness took a more serious turn, and he was so prostrated by it that he was hardly conscious of the unsparing care and self-abnegation with which Valda waited upon him. Her energies were all absorbed in the task, and she felt a sort of thankfulness for the exhausting call upon her time and thought ; yet she could not help counting the days as they wore away.

Four, five, six days went by in uneventful monotony. It was now nearly a week since Hamîda's visit, and she had said that ten days were the limit of time,—there were only four days



left then. In four days he would be gone, and there would be nothing left to fear or to hope. The sun would have set, and the whole land would be left dark,—how dark and how dreary Valda hardly dared to let herself realise. And yet then, when the long suspense was over, some sort of resignation might be possible ; resignation,—the key-note of the creed of Islam, and the meaning of the name,—poor Valda hoped for nothing else.

## CHAPTER XIX

THE Pâsha lay sleeping quietly inside the mosquito-curtains tucked round his little white French bed. The crisis of his illness was past, and he was getting rapidly better ; but he slept a good deal during the day, and the rooms in that wing of the palace were kept very quiet and still. Valda had nursed him with unremitting vigilance ; but now that there was no longer any cause for anxiety, she was able to take some relaxation from her labours, and she stood at the window of the sick-room, which she had opened to admit a little fresh air, and looked idly out into the garden glowing in the glory of the golden afternoon.

It was far on in March, and the sun, which had been shining all the winter from skies of cloudless blue, was beginning to gather strength, and to send forth heat such as is never known in England save on the hottest day of summer ; yet the garden was green and beautiful, with all the exquisite and tender freshness of spring. The great apricot-trees, on the high branches of which the little gray-green birds were singing deliriously, were one mass of pale shell-pink blossom, and the air was heavy with the scent of orange and lemon trees in full

flower. All round the garden the closely massed shrubberies were glorious in their bridal array of waxen white, and the starry, shining flowers grew so thick that they jostled each other off their stalks, and fell in a white shower round each tree.

On the other side of the garden Valda could see one of the ladies of the *harim* engaged in picking up the fallen flowers from the marble walk. It was Nâzla Hânem, a distant relation of Valda's mother, who, having been obliged by the ill-temper of her husband to demand her papers of divorce, and being too old to think of being married again, had come to spend her remaining days with her kinswoman. Valda's grave face relaxed into a smile as she watched her; for the little economies of Nâzla Hânem were a standing joke in the *harim*, and this was one of them. The hospitality of the Pâsha was free and lavish; one person more or less at the liberal table that he provided made no difference, and all his wife's relations were welcome to come and stay as long as they liked. Nâzla Hânem had therefore her own small allowance intact to spend as she chose; but she had a weakness which is very unusual among the Turks, and very much abhorred by them; she was inclined to be miserly. She did not like to spend her money in the scent-shops of the bazaars, and yet she wished her clothes to have the delicate fragrance that distinguished those of the other ladies; so she employed her spare moments in collecting rose-petals, orange-flowers, lavender,—whatever sweet-smelling flowers happened to be in season,—and then spread them out on newspapers over the floor of her room

to dry, after which she would make them up into innumerable little muslin sachets and lay them by with her clothes.

Valda stood watching the bending figure under the orange-trees with an absent gaze that showed little interest in the scene; but suddenly, as she looked, she saw another figure come out from behind a large bush of crimson damask roses, and her expression changed. That tall, stout figure, in gorgeous rainbow-coloured silk, could only be Hamîda's. She had on her turban and veil, but she was without the *ferâghje*, or long black cloak, and her dress, swathed tightly round her figure in her determination to keep the train off the ground, revealed an ankle and an outline not to be mistaken. She paused to say a few words to Nâzla Hânem as she passed, but she was evidently on her way to visit Valda. With what object had she come?

Valda left her post at the window, and softly opening the door, so as not to disturb the sleeping Pâsha, slipped noiselessly out of the room. Once outside, she flew swiftly along the deserted suite until she came to the work-room at the end, where a group of Circassians were squatting on the floor round a big basket of oranges which they were cutting up and dividing among themselves. Margaret and Djemâl-ed-Din were sharing in the feast, and, seated together on a long sofa-bolster in the centre, they were enjoying the lion's share of the blood-oranges which were being revealed by the process of dissection.

Ayôosha was in the act of shovelling a fresh

consignment of quarters upon Margaret's plate, and was bearing down her protestations that she had had enough with an assurance of '*Crumsa, crumsa, Marmozelle, pek yi* (red, red, very good!)' when Valda came in. At the sight of her mistress Ayôosha started up with a guilty look on her face, and began a voluble and deprecating explanation, in which Djemâl-ed-Din's desires were made an excuse for the situation; but Valda had not come to scold, even if Margaret's presence and unperurbed gaze had not been a sufficient guarantee that no mischief was going on. She sent off Ayôosha to take her place by the Pâsha, with strict and stern injunctions not to disturb him, and to call her directly if he woke, and then she passed out into the corridor and glided down the stairs.

Hamîda was just entering the shadowy vestibule below when Valda met her, and flimsily dressed though she was, she was panting with the heat.

'*Allah, Allah, Allah!*' she began at once with her usual vivacity, 'what a glare, what a heat! God preserve us from the fate of melting. The ground is like unto a furnace that sends forth fire, and the heat of it mounts up and overcomes one. *Wallah el Nebi!* My knees shake, I am undone!'

She sank upon the lowest step of the stairs as she spoke, and dragging out her pocket-handkerchief, applied herself vigorously to the task of mopping her face. Valda brought her a cushion to sit upon, and then asked her what had brought her out at this unusual hour.

'Oh, my dear, nothing but my concern for you,

and my weak-minded desire to do a kindness. I was up nearly all last night, and I ought to be in bed now, but I had to come. No ; I won't come up-stairs, for I cannot stay ; my carriage is waiting, and the coachman is swearing himself black in the face at having to come out,—God reward him for his profanity ! How is the honourable Pâsha ?'

'He is better. He hopes that he will be able to go out to-morrow, and he intends to get up for a few hours this evening.'

'*Ma' sh' Allah* (God bless him) !' ejaculated Hamîda benignantly.

'But it is not to inquire for him that you have come to-day, Hamîda. You have something else, —what is it ?'

'Ah, I see you guess ! Well, my dear, prudence is prudence, and God cool your eyes with this knowledge ; but there are seasons when it may be well to disregard it. I saw that unfortunate young man, and I gave him back his letter with your message.'

'Well, well,' demanded Valda impatiently, 'what did he say ? Why is he unfortunate ?'

'*Allah ermânet !* He was in despair. He is an Englishman, and you know the immovable calm of that iron nation. He did not tear his hair nor rend his clothes, but this morning he sent me a message, and I saw him again ; and, Valda, a heart of stone could not refuse to pity him. He is obliged to go sooner than he thought ; he has to leave early to-morrow morning in order to catch his ship.'

'To-morrow morning ?' said Valda dully.

'Yes,—and it can do you no possible harm now

—he gave me a letter of farewell to you, which he made me promise to deliver. Here it is, Valda—surely you cannot refuse to receive it?—a letter of farewell——’

Valda put out her hand quickly, and took the packet that Hamîda held out to her. Her fingers closed upon it with a firm grasp, but she made no motion to open it, and she suffered her hand to sink to her side, while her eyes gazed out into vacancy.

‘Are you not going to read it?’ asked Hamîda curiously. She had read the previous letter before restoring it to its writer, as Valda had known only too well that she would; but the manipulations that were skilful enough to be imperceptible to the Englishman would have been dangerous in dealing with her friend, and she had not dared to make herself acquainted with the contents of this letter before delivering it. She had counted upon obtaining Valda’s confidence, and she was burning to know what was in the letter; but she was destined to be disappointed.

‘Open it, open it, Valda,’ she said eagerly. ‘Do you not want to see what he says?’

‘Not now,—presently perhaps,’ said Valda.

‘Ah! You will not open it before me,’ said Hamîda, piqued. ‘Well, then, I had better go. No doubt now that you have got what I have brought you, you will be glad to see my back. The best friend must expect no pay but ingratitude,—so it is written,—but the day will come when you will want me again. Then, perhaps, you will repent that you have not treated me

better. *Allah!*' she went on, relenting as she noticed Valda's wan looks, and felt the icy coldness of her hand. 'How cold you are,—in this heat! And you look like death; are you ill, Valda?'

'No—my hands are always cold—it is nothing.'

'Well, I would advise you to give up doing Ramazân. It is folly, as I have always told you, and it will make you old and frightful before your time. Already you are much too thin; look at me, how different I am. Thank God, I never took such crotchets into my head, and what is the result? I am as fat now as I was at twenty, much fatter even. Adieu, peace remain with you.'

Hamîda departed by the way she had come, and slipping the letter into the bosom of her dress, Valda went back to the Pâsha. He was awake, she found, and his long sleep had done him so much good that he was quite cheerful and inclined to talk. She stayed with him until sunset, and it was not until the boom of the gun from the citadel shook the palace that she found an opportunity for reading her letter. She sent Margaret across the garden to the other side at once, but she herself lingered to examine the contents of the little covered dishes that were brought to the Pâsha in order to ascertain that they were all that they should be, and when at last she went to her dinner, the way she chose to take was not through the scented dusk of the garden.

The Pâsha's keys were lying on his writing-table in the saloon, and taking them up as she went past, Valda let herself into the *selâmlek*, and sped



through the gloomy corridor until she found herself in the wide vestibule which had been the scene of her interview with Fitzroy. There, with both doors safely locked on either side of her, she stopped, and standing in the window recess through which the red strip of sunset sky behind the little white mosque and its slender minaret made a picture painted in very much the same colours as on that well-remembered afternoon, she drew out her letter and read it. Fitzroy had written in French.

MY DEAREST FRIEND—I have seen your friend, and she has given me your message, and the letter that you would not consent to receive from me. Perhaps you were right—but oh, I hope that you will not be so cruel a second time, for this is the last chance of addressing you that remains to me, and my heart is nearly breaking. For three weeks now I have not seen you, and to-morrow's sunrise is the last for me in this country.

To-morrow I must leave Cairo, and if I leave you, I leave every hope of happiness also. My life is not worth living without you. Will you not take pity on me, Valda? You know what I said to you that night at the Opera-House; the more I think of it, the more clearly I see that it is the only right and wise course to take. You could not disguise from me that your happiness was concerned as well as mine. I know you love me—I know you do, Valda. Even if the hot kisses, which burnt my heart as well as my hand that afternoon in the *selâmlek*, had not told me so, I should have known it. You can never be happy except with me now, Valda, and why should your life be spoiled as well as mine? Come with me to-morrow—come, and lead a new life in a new home and a new land, and let us be happy together.

To-night I will be at the entrance to the back court

of the palace, opposite the little mosque where the gate will be open for Ramazân, and I will see to it that the porter gives no trouble. I will be there at midnight, and I will wait there until the morning for you to join me. You can come, you can surely manage to come some time during those hours, and when you are once in my care, I will do the rest. Do not write to refuse me; there is not time, and I will take no refusal. To-night, remember, I shall be there. I shall be waiting and longing, and oh, Valda, I trust to you not to let it be in vain. I love you and I trust you, and I am eternally your slave and servant,

HENRY FITZROY.

This was the love-letter that Valda received—she who had never yet received a love-letter in her life; this was the appeal that she read by the light of the dying glow in the West shining over the Nile through the dust and cobwebs of the dingy window. Fitzroy's handwriting was large and clear, and she read it without difficulty; she read it through several times, but she did not feel as if she could realise it, and when she at last appeared in the dining-room she had the dazed expression of one who is walking in a dream.

The ladies' dinner was half-way through; but Margaret, who supposed that Valda had been detained by the Pâsha, had made the slaves keep hot some of each course for her, and they placed before her a row of little pewter pots containing soup and chicken and rice, and some sweet-balls and meat-puffs. She could touch none of them, and her mother was roused from the consideration of her own ailments to observe how exceedingly ill her daughter was looking.

‘You ought not to be allowed to go on keeping Ramazân, Valda,’ she said. ‘It is written in the pages of the air that it is too much for a delicate woman like you, and I shall speak to my son-in-law about it. What is he thinking about to permit such folly?’ She delivered herself with all the greater indignation that she was annoyed at being excluded from participation in the interest and novelty of self-martyrdom; it was an aggravation of her injury to see Valda persisting in it, when she was plainly less fitted than herself to endure it.

‘The Pâsha knows it is my wish, and he does not like to vex me by opposing it,’ said Valda, quietly. ‘He knows also that it would be no good. Let me alone, Mother dear; Ramazân will soon be over now.’

‘Yes, but not soon enough to save you from an illness if you go on like this. God is great, but He cannot preserve mortals from the consequences of their own folly. Why cannot you act reasonably, and if you are determined to perform the full measure of the fast, put off the remaining days until you are better able to endure them! That is what Nâzla Hânem does when she feels exhausted, and it is a sensible plan. She had her luncheon with us to-day, and she will fast another day instead, in a month’s time. A day now and then can do nobody harm, and you can spread it out over six months until you have counted in your appointed number of days.’

The old lady, when she was once started upon a grievance, was apt to go on for an indefinite length of time, and she harried her daughter during

the whole of the rest of dinner, but without producing the slightest effect upon her resolution. Valda drank a little water, and helped herself to a jelly made with mandarine oranges for which she was supposed to have a special liking ; but she only played with it, and presently she rose, saying that it was time to get ready for the office.

She knelt that night with her friends and her slaves in the obscurity of the curtained ante-chamber, and listened to the monotonous chanting of the *uléma*, and to the guttural voices of the worshippers of her own faith,—was it for the last time ? Fitzroy's letter lay against her heart, and though she knelt and bowed and prostrated herself, and moved her lips with the rest, she could utter no prayer ; she felt powerless to sink her own identity in the consideration of the greatness of God. She tried desperately to overcome the mental and moral paralysis which had come over her, but her heart and mind seemed alike numbed and dead, and she was frightened by her own calmness. Her heart felt like a stone in her breast. Was she going to yield, was she going to do this thing ? To-night must decide it—for good or evil, she must make up her mind to-night.

There were distinguished visitors at the *harim* that evening. As soon as the service was over they began to arrive, and the Circassians rushed to wait upon them, and to prepare coffee and sherbet, and put out comfits to hand round. The white-veiled ladies streamed into the reception rooms, laughing and chattering, and rustling in the rich silks and satins that were revealed when their long

black cloaks were removed. They had all sorts of stories to tell; accounts of their doings during Ramazân, of their visits to their friends, and of the marriages that had been arranged. Marriage and divorce, dress and *piastres*, and the characters and failings of their friends and their friends' husbands,—there was plenty to gossip about, and they did it with great spirit and animation. The *harîm* was full of bustle and gaiety, and Valda forced herself to join in the conversation, and to listen and laugh as if she found amusement in it.

She acted her part well; but the strain became every moment greater, and at last she excused herself on the plea of her husband's health, and leaving the gay company in the brilliantly lighted rooms of the *harîm*, she crept out into the dark garden under the stars.

## CHAPTER XX

THE little French clock upon the Pâsha's writing-table was striking ten when Valda entered her sitting-room, and his Excellency, wrapped up in a fur-lined dressing-gown, was stretched at full length upon a sofa with a French novel in his hand. He had got up that evening for a few hours, as he had intended, and had been much disappointed at Valda's message explaining how it was that she was detained. It was unavoidable, he knew, and he had resigned himself to it ; but he had been pining for her return for an hour past, and now, at the sound of her step, he flung away his book, and raised himself on his elbow with a smile that demanded her congratulations on his convalescence.

The moment he saw her face, however, he uttered an exclamation of dismay, and sprang up from his couch. 'Valda, Valda, my dear Valda !' he exclaimed ; 'what is the matter ?'

He came a few steps to meet her, and taking both her hands in his, gazed with anxiety into her white strained face. Then, as she did not answer, he took her up in his arms and carried her to her own sofa by the side of his, and laid her down.

'It is nothing,' Valda managed to say at last

with a long-drawn sigh that was like a gasp for breath ; ‘only those people stayed so long, and I was so tired. I thought I should never get away, but at last I said that I must go to you.’

The Pâsha hung over her as she lay on the sofa like a pale ghost in her blue draperies, and he pressed a passionate kiss upon the soft waves of her golden hair. ‘My poor Valda, my dear little one, why must you sacrifice yourself to those silly women? Why didn’t you come to me before? I have been wanting you so much,—I want you always,—your place is with me, and I will take care of you. There must be an end of this sort of thing once and for all.’

‘Yes,’ said Valda faintly ; ‘this is the end. After to-night——’ she broke off suddenly, and put up her hand to her head with a perplexed, uncertain gesture.

‘Do you feel ill? Is your head aching?’ asked the Pâsha with tender solicitude.

‘Yes, it aches, and I feel strange,’ she answered, and then with an abrupt change of tone : ‘Is my little Djemâl-ed-Din asleep? Did he go to sleep quietly and happily to-night?’

‘Yes, he was very good to-night. The Ramazân service seems to please him wonderfully, the little rogue, and he comes back from the other side in a peaceable humour. Mademoiselle is a splendid person for managing him, though, and it is to her increasing influence, rather than to the novelty of Ramazân, that I am inclined to attribute the improvement. I hope we shall be able to keep her.’

‘Yes,’ said Valda ; ‘you like her very much, don’t you ? And my little Djêmal, he is fond of her, and she is fond of him. She would be good to him, and he would be happy in her care. If anything happened to me, Pâsha-jim——’

‘Valda, Valda, do not talk like that !’ cried the Pâsha, interrupting her in a hurry. ‘Do you wish to break my heart ? You are worn out ; you have been nursing me until you have lost all strength and spirit, and have become a prey to melancholy thoughts ; and I have been culpably blind and careless to let you do it. But now my eyes are opened, and it shall go on no longer ; from this moment I take you into my charge.’

Valda lay still, with half-closed eyes, and did not look up nor answer. The Pâsha stood looking down at her for a few moments, and then he said with kindly authority : ‘The best thing for you to do now is to get to bed as soon as possible, and you will have to stay there until you are better. Come, Valda, you shall go at once.’

‘Very well, Pâsha, since you wish it,’ said Valda with unexpected docility.

She let him lift her up, and carry her into the next room ; she let him call for her slave to undress her, and she allowed him to help in the process without a word of resistance. She was entirely passive in his hands, and this strange mood of obedience and submission was, of all the symptoms that she showed, the one which disturbed and alarmed the Pâsha the most. He laid her in her little white bed himself, and himself tucked the mosquito-curtains safely round her. The



clock struck eleven while he was doing it, and Valda counted the strokes to herself. Eleven o'clock, and he was coming at midnight ; only one hour to the time.

'Are you not going to bed yourself also, Effen'?' she said, turning her head on the pillow to look at her husband as he stood watching her through the white net of the curtain he had drawn round her. 'You should not stay up. I am quite comfortable now, and if you lose your sleep and get ill again, it will be the worse for both of us to-morrow.'

The common-sense of this conclusion was obvious, and the Pâsha did not dispute it. Though the days were hot, the nights were cold, and even in his furs he was beginning to shiver. He stayed until he saw Valda close her eyes, and compose herself, as he thought, to sleep, and then he went off to his own bed ; but no sooner had he turned off the electric light than Valda opened her eyes again, and then she lay, motionless but wide awake, gazing into the semi-darkness of the quiet room.

A little cup, half full of olive-oil, with a tiny piece of cotton wool pinched up into a kind of wick floating in it, stood before the mirror on her dressing-table, and threw a flickering circle of light on the richly ornamented ceiling, leaving all the corners and recesses of the room in shadowy darkness. The Pâsha's bed, with its muslin curtains closely drawn round it, loomed like a great white box at the other end of the room, and from the sound of even and regular breathing

proceeding from it, Valda could tell that he had fallen into a quiet and easy sleep. She lay without moving, listening to the familiar sound, and to the ticking of the little travelling-clock which was quite audible through the folding-doors between the bedroom and the saloon. The minutes passed, slowly, slowly, and Valda lay waiting and listening, but at last she heard the sweet chimes of the clock begin to strike. Twelve strokes,—the time had come. It was midnight now, and Fitzroy was there. He was outside the palace walls waiting in the cold night air under the stars, while she lay quiet here, safely tucked in by her husband. This then was to be the solution. The Pâsha had unknowingly taken the matter into his own hands, and she had submitted to the ruling of fate through his unconscious agency.

She lay as rigid as a wax figure, without changing the pose in which her husband had placed her; but the frozen coldness which had taken possession of her like a sort of paralysis of body and brain, was now giving way to fever. Her heart began to beat fast, faster and faster, and the blood flew like fire through her veins. She was soon in a burning heat, moving her head uneasily upon the pillow with a sense of intolerable discomfort and pain. The restlessness grew upon her, and she began to toss from side to side with low moans of misery, until at last a murmur of sleepy inquiry from the other side of the room warned her that she was disturbing the Pâsha. That she must not do at any cost, and with a great effort she contrived to control herself until

she was assured that he was fast asleep again ; then she could endure it no longer. She threw off the bed-clothes, and pulling up the curtain so carefully fastened round her, slipped noiselessly out of bed.

As she put on her pink morning-gown, she remembered the letter she had left in the dress that she had been wearing that evening, and she felt to see if it was safe. Yes, it was there still ; neither Sacêda nor the Pâsha had seen it as they undressed her. She took it out now, and held it in her hand as she passed out of the room, and, softly closing the door behind her, began to pace up and down the dark and deserted suite of rooms beyond. If the Pâsha should miss her, and find her there, he would not be surprised, for she often had these fits of restlessness, when it was impossible for her to stay still in bed ; and whenever there was any cause for anxiety about Djemâled-Din, it was her habit to get up at all hours of the night to make sure that he was asleep. Her steps took her straight to his room now, and she stood for a moment by his cot, which was drawn up to the side of his slave's bed, under the shelter of a mosquito-curtain specially contrived to protect them both, that Valda had herself made but the other day.

Both Ayôosha and the child were sleeping soundly, and by the glimmer of the night-light, which burned in its little cup of oil on a chair at the foot of the bed, Valda could dimly see, through the white veiling, the golden curls surrounding the beautiful little face resting so

peacefully on the pillow. She stood and gazed at him with a bursting heart. 'My little Djêmal, my little Djêmal!' she murmured to herself. 'Can I be going to leave you in order to secure my own happiness,—can I indeed be looking at you for the last time? Oh, my baby!'

She turned away with smarting tears in her eyes, and went back to the saloon, passing through the long work-room on her way, and picking her steps carefully between the mattresses of the sleeping slaves. The autocratic old Anâna, the mercurial Sacêda, and the little girls who were in training to become slaves, but who at present did little else than run messages and play with Djemâl-ed-Din, —they were all stretched prostrate under their quilted coverlets, wrapped in heavy slumber, and Valda's light footfall, passing through among them, could not penetrate even to their dreams.

She closed the door upon them as she re-entered the saloon; but instead of returning to her room, she went to one of the tall windows and threw it wide open. The cool night air, laden with the sickly scent of the orange-blossom, which came up from the dark and shadowy garden below, blew refreshingly into her face, and leaning out as far as she could, she fixed her eyes upon the black pile of buildings opposite. The garden was shut in by the three wings of the palace, but there, —there, on the other side of that parapet opposite, he was waiting now; he was waiting, and wondering why she did not come.

'I trust to you not to let it be in vain,' he had written. 'I love you and I trust you,—my life is

not worth living without you,—come to me and let us be happy together.’ The phrases of his letter rang in her head with incessant appealing force, and she clenched the paper in her hand as she thought of them. How easy it would be to do it! So far as the flight itself was concerned there were no difficulties in the way. The Pâsha’s keys lay upon his table, where he always left them. She could let herself into the *selâmlek*, and so into the outer court where the gates stood wide open during Ramazân. In three minutes she would be outside the palace walls. There was the porter, it was true, but he would probably be safe inside his lodge; Fitzroy would have secured his silence. There was no difficulty or danger; it was on her decision only that all depended.

‘Will you not take pity on me, Valda? You love me,—I know you do.’ The appeal seemed to sound in her ears like the echo of his voice out of the night. ‘Oh, I do, I do!’ cried the poor girl, stretching out her arms into the darkness, ‘I do love him; and it is true that I can never be happy except with him. Oh, if I might be happy,—and I might, I might! I should be, if I could be with him!’

The picture that he had drawn of their life together rose up in her mind,—a life of freedom in a foreign country with him—and it was within her reach! Now, this instant, it was in her power to take a step that would alter all the conditions of her life. One step, and it was done. She had but to put together a little bundle containing a change of clothing, and slip on her long black

cloak ; that, with a shawl to throw over her head, would be the only preparation she would need to make. She would leave all her jewels and pretty things behind—she would not rob the Pâsha of anything—but, ah ! in comparison with the loss of herself what would he care about anything else ?

‘If he would only console himself with some other woman, and be happy with her!’ Valda thought ; ‘but he never would. If he would marry Mademoiselle,—she would be just the wife for him. He likes her, and she likes him, and she would be good to my little Djêmal,—but it is no use thinking about it. Nothing would ever comfort him, and he might even put the blame on her, and turn her away. Then there would be no one left to care for my baby, and what might not happen to him in the hands of these thoughtless slaves ?’

She gazed with straining eyes into the starlit night. Above the parapet of the roof she could see the point of the minaret which marked the spot where Fitzroy was waiting. He was waiting, waiting,—and some strong attraction drew her to go to him. The thought of her baby was not enough to enable her to resist it. She had left him, believing that she would see him no more ; but now she was thinking of Margaret, of the pure heart and mind which had always been opposed to the debasing influence of Hamîda and the tempting persuasions of Fitzroy ; and in the last throes of the struggle going on within her, the memory of the fleeting spiritual glimpses that she had gained through her association with the

English girl was a deciding factor. More than the Pâsha's love, more than her own sense of honour and self-respect, more even than the little clinging arms of her child, the vision of Margaret's clear-eyed gaze had power to hold her back, and the thought of the view that Mademoiselle would take of her fall brought the hot colour surging into her cheeks. If Mademoiselle were here now, she knew what she would say. She would say that it was better to endure any sacrifice, any suffering, any loss, rather than purchase happiness by such a step as this, and the light in her eyes would shine with some more sustaining spirit than the mere submission to the will of destiny.

The little clock struck one when Valda was at the window ; it struck two, and she was still there. She had not decided yet, but the moment when she might have yielded to the temptation that assailed her had passed ; the remembrance of Margaret had interfered to check her when her impulse might have carried her into action. When she at last turned away from the window, she began to walk up and down the room in an agony of indecision, but by this time she was in a condition of physical suffering that made her incapable of realising anything but a sense of overpowering pain. Her head was aching with a violence that was absolute torture, and pressing her hands to her temples, she paced the room in vain longing for relief. Up and down, and round and round, like a tortured creature that cannot keep still, she staggered desperately, thinking at first that the agony must soon abate, and that when it did

she would be able again to collect her thoughts ; but as it became more and more acute, she lost sight of her purpose. She forgot that Fitzroy was waiting for her outside the palace walls ; she forgot the meaning of the long struggle with herself ; she forgot everything,—all was blotted out by the fierce pain that seemed to be burning out her very life. Both reason and volition were swallowed up in that agony ; but impelled by a sort of instinct that made her bear up against it as long as possible, she kept on her feet, and staggered on blindly.

The room was but dimly lighted by the six great windows through which the dawn was creeping, and had it not been so spacious she must have fallen against some of the furniture ; but at last her strength gave way. She paused for a moment, trying to save herself, vainly groping with her hands. She did not know where she was, nor what was happening to her ; but she felt as if she were tottering on the edge of a frightful precipice, with unimaginable depths below her. ‘The gulf,—the dreadful gulf!’ she murmured shuddering, and then, as she felt herself plunging forward, consciousness left her.

She fell all her length across the threshold of the door that led out into the corridor ; and there, in the gray light of the early morning, the Pâsha found her lying senseless on her face, with one arm stretched out and Fitzroy’s letter crushed up in her hand.



## CHAPTER XXI

WHEN Margaret entered Valda's sitting-room next morning, she found it empty. It was past nine o'clock, and the Pâsha and his wife were not often as late as that even in Ramazân. Margaret was surprised ; but the cheerful room, with the brilliant morning sunshine streaming in through its open windows, told no tale of the tragedy of which it had been the scene during the night, and it was not until she went to the slaves in the work-room that she suspected that anything was wrong.

The Circassians were all huddled together in a corner of the room, and the moment she saw their faces Margaret knew that some misfortune must have happened. They had all been crying, and now they were trying to find occupation in lavishing caresses and bestowing presents upon Djemâl-ed-Din, who sat, the image of childish self-importance, on his sofa-bolster on the floor with an array of tributes spread out on a little stool before him, and the weeping slaves gathered round.

‘What is the matter?’ asked Margaret directly. ‘Is Hânem Effendi ill?’

‘Yes, Marmozelle, yes, she is very ill,’ Ayôosha

replied, the ready tears springing up again in her eyes. 'The Pâsha Effendi found her in a swoon this morning. When Manetîнна came in the morning with *yémék* (food) she was not in her bed, and when the Pâsha went to look for her he found her on the floor in the saloon, stretched out like one dead. *Wach! wach!* (alas, alas!).'

The other slaves all joined in the cry of wailing, and the susceptible Sacêda, covering her head with her skirts, rushed out of the room.

'I must go and see how she is,' said Margaret, resolving to find out for herself what was the real state of things. 'Is the Pâsha with her now?'

'Yes, Marmozelle. The *Hâkim* (doctor) has been, and now the Pâsha is there and the *biûgue Hânem*, and the *biûgue-biûgue Hânem*. You had better not go. Marmozelle, Marmozelle! Don't go! *Ullah, Ullah, Ullah!* She is gone, and the Pâsha is certainly angry with her; what will he do to her?'

Margaret felt vaguely that the slaves, for all their readiness to impart to her the alarming news, had looked at her rather strangely. Already they had guessed that she was in disgrace; but she had no prevision of it, and she hurried across the saloon to the bedroom at the other end with no other thought in her mind but anxiety for Valda.

The door was opened in response to her knock by the Pâsha himself, and when he saw her he came out, closing the door behind him. His face was pale and worn with illness and anxiety, but it was the change in the expression of his eyes that struck Margaret most. Those kind blue

eyes had never rested on her before except in smiling appreciation or benignant friendliness,—what had made them suddenly so cold and hard? What was the meaning of that look with which he was silently regarding her? Margaret was struck with a sudden chill as she met it, and her heart sank horribly within her.

‘Madame is ill?’ she asked. ‘I was alarmed by what the slaves said, but I hope it is not as serious as they made out. She is not in danger?’

‘She is in the greatest danger,’ the Pâsha said briefly. ‘The leech who has been here this morning is the best in Cairo, but he can do nothing for her, and he holds out little hope of recovery.’

‘Oh, Pâsha!’ cried Margaret, with an irrepressible gasp of horror at the quiet words that went so far beyond her fears, and then she stood speechless for some moments. ‘What is the matter? What has happened?’ she asked at last, as the Pâsha did not speak.

‘Why do you ask me? You know better than I do,’ he answered scathingly. ‘For weeks I have seen that her mind has been preying upon her body; now the end has come in the fever which has struck her down. I did not know what was wrong, but you knew all the time; you have been aiding and abetting in it, carrying messages and arranging meetings, and conducting the whole intrigue,—you whom I trusted—oh, how I have been deceived in you!’

The blow had fallen, and it was on Margaret that it fell, as she had always known that it would. She felt that it was useless to try to defend

herself, and yet she must needs try. 'Indeed, Pâsha, you are wronging me,' she said in a choked voice, 'I have never done anything against you ; I have done nothing that I should be ashamed of your knowing, and from the very first I have implored Valda to tell you everything.'

'Ah !' exclaimed the Pâsha, with an indignation that was not unmixed with disgust, 'you think, perhaps, that you can blind me still, but you are mistaken ; when my eyes have once been opened I am not taken in again. I know too much, Mademoiselle. Did I not see you myself with that cursed Englishman at Esbékiah ? I supposed that it was upon your own account, and I put down the guilty confusion that you showed on being surprised by me to a natural shyness ; but even then I thought it was strange. Now I understand ; you had good reason to look ashamed.'

'I was there on your account, I was there simply and solely to beg him to leave Valda alone,' said Margaret with quivering lips. 'He had contrived to meet her in spite of all my efforts to prevent it, and I had reason to fear that he would do so again. I went, without Valda's knowledge, to tell him that he was wrecking her happiness and her life, and I implored him to be content with the mischief that he had already done without trying to work more.'

'It is easy to tell me this,' the Pâsha answered with cold contempt. 'Of course you try to justify yourself ; but clever as you are, it will not serve you now. You wish to throw the whole blame upon my poor wife, who cannot defend herself,

but I know that without instigation and encouragement she would never have lent herself to such an intrigue. She never thought of such things before you came, you whom I thought so honourable and straightforward, and such a safe companion for her. And this is the game that you have been playing under your mask of innocence—oh, I have been blind and besotted! But now my eyes are opened, and you can play with me no more. Look at this letter which I found in Valda's hand this morning, when I took her up half dead from the floor of this room. Look at it,—read it,—the tale it tells is simple enough. Can you explain that?'

Margaret took the crumpled sheets which he held out to her, and the cloud of horror seemed to deepen round her as she read. '*I have seen your friend, and she has given me your message and the letter that you refused to receive from me——*' no wonder the Pâsha assumed that she was the go-between, and nothing would ever disabuse him of the idea. Margaret was confounded, but as she read on, she lost sight of the consequences to herself in her horror at the revelations that it contained. A meeting in the *selâmlek*,—a meeting at the Opera-House,—burning kisses,—assurances of love and trust,—what references were these? They betrayed everything to the Pâsha, they betrayed much more than she had known or guessed at; and then the appeal with which it ended,—the plan of escape, made out with such horrible precision and exactitude, and fixed for last night—had Valda entertained it? Had

she been in the act of carrying it out when her senses had deserted her ?

Margaret's brain reeled as she read the letter, and when she came to the end she covered her eyes with her hand. 'I had no idea that it had gone as far as this,' she said faintly. 'This is terrible,—this is terrible !'

'You see,' said the Pâsha grimly, as he took back the letter, 'this paper tells me everything. It is useless for you to try to deny your complicity.'

'I have been to blame, but not in the way, and not to the degree that you think,' said Margaret desperately. 'I ought to have insisted upon telling you of the accident that was the beginning of it all, as I wished to do, but it was against Valda's will. She forbade me, and I had to choose between you and her. How was I to know that it would go on to this? In the beginning I may have made a mistake, but I assure you, Pâsha, that I have had no hand in any plot against you.'

'What was the beginning?' said the Pâsha coldly. 'What was the accident? Let me hear your story.'

Margaret told it. She related exactly how the incident had happened, and what her part in it had been. She told him of her meeting with Fitzroy in the palace gardens, and what had passed between them. She kept nothing back, even of her conversation with Valda, and the subsequent interview with Fitzroy at Esbékiah, which was at the end of her part in the affair ; but she saw that the Pâsha, though he accepted her facts so far as they helped him to form an idea of the course of events, was

utterly incredulous of her story as the whole truth. He thought she was making out a case for herself, and presenting the facts that would tell most in her favour,—that was natural enough, but he believed there was more behind that she would not tell ; his confidence in her was destroyed, and henceforward her frankness would be for him merely the mask for a deeper duplicity.

Margaret felt all this, and despair settled down upon her with such paralysing force, that she could hardly tell her story. She struggled through with it ; but she felt how lame it sounded, and she saw that on the Pâsha's judgment of her it produced not the slightest effect.

He listened silently to her, and when she had finished, turned to leave the room without a word of comment. 'I must go back to my wife,' he said. 'Her mother and grandmother are with her now, but they have no idea of nursing ; they cannot be left.'

He was moving away, but Margaret stopped him with an appealing gesture, 'Oh, Excellency !' she said wistfully, 'cannot I do something,—something to help ?'

'No, thank you, Mademoiselle,' he said sternly ; 'your services will not be required. The doctor will send a trained nurse who will do all that is necessary, and I shall be there the whole time. I do not wish for your presence in my wife's room. It can only remind her of the scoundrel who has destroyed her happiness. I suppose,' he added abruptly, 'that he has left Cairo? According to this letter he was to start this morning—to catch

the boat at Ismailîa, no doubt,—and he would not be likely to sacrifice his passage. If he is still within my reach it shall be the worse for him, but I fear it is not likely.’ He paused, with his hand upon the latch of the door, and a look of still ferocity flashed into his face and transformed it so, that Margaret shivered under a sudden apprehension of worse evils to come. His voice, however, remained under his control, and he went on calmly. ‘In any case, I cannot allow you to leave the *harîm*. The guards at the gates will have orders not to let you pass either by day or night, so it will be useless for you to try. I give you notice also that none of your letters can be sent except those which are directed to England, and none will be delivered to you except those from abroad.’

Those were his final words, and the deliberate distrust that they implied made their force seem the more cruel. Margaret went back to Djemâled-Din without any gleam of hope or comfort to sustain her, and in the days that followed she was like one stunned.

There was nothing for her to do but to attend to the little boy, and endeavour to counteract as far as she could the injudicious behaviour of the slaves, whose one idea of showing sympathy for Valda was to do all they could to spoil her child ; but it was a difficult and thankless task. The Circassians gave themselves up to the violence of their emotions with an *abandon* which made mourning a sort of luxury, and in the suspense and anxiety, the whispered communications with all the other members of the *harîm*, and the visits of condolence and



inquiry from outsiders, they found an excitement which was plainly not altogether unpalatable.

For five days Valda lay delirious in the grip of consuming pain, and the Turkish and Greek doctors looked graver every time that they came, and said that they could only regard it as a mercy that she was unconscious of her suffering. She raved without ceasing, and the Pâsha, hanging distracted over her pillow, had to listen to the wild words of her delirium, in which she called constantly for Fitzroy, pouring forth her love and longing for him. She summoned up over and over again the scenes that had passed between them, the locked doors of the *selâmlek* vestibule, the grotesque figures of the masked ball, the vision of his face as she had first seen it against the sunset under the acacias, mixing reality and romance so wildly together that it was impossible to tell one from the other.

The Pâsha's heart was wrung, but what tormented him more than all else was the mention of his own name, and the agony that invariably followed. She cried out that she was falling, falling, and shrieked to Fitzroy to save her. Why did he not come? Why would he not reach out his hand to save her from destruction? This went on for a whole week, and then she sank into the stillness of exhaustion, and the end came.

Margaret, who had been sitting with little Djemâl-ed-Din all day in the garden, had brought him in towards the close of the afternoon, when Sacêda came to her with a scared face. Hânem Effendi was sensible, she said, and wanted Made-

moiselle,—she was to come immediately. Margaret hoped this meant that the crisis of the illness was past, but the moment she entered the darkened room and saw the terribly changed face upon the pillows, she knew that all hope was vain. Valda was dying ; the stamp of death was already upon her features. Her eyes were like the eyes of some hunted creature, so large and frightened and desperate did they look ; but for a brief interval her senses had returned to her and her mind was clear.

She recognised Margaret as she came up to the bedside, and turning her head a little, signed to the nurse to leave them alone together. The Pâsha had been called away, but he might be back at any moment, and Valda had a look of feverish anxiety in her eyes.

‘In my cabinet,’ she whispered, with a long sighing breath, as Margaret bent over her,—‘the diamond star—you know the one—and a *yâshmâk* out of my box, a *yâshmâk* that I have worn ; it has been ironed, but you will see the difference——’ Her voice failed her, and she could not go on ; but Margaret understood, and went and brought the things quickly. Valda’s wasted fingers closed upon the flashing star, and she pressed it for a moment to her heart ; then she wrapped it up in the piece of fine white muslin that Margaret had brought her, and handed it back to her. ‘Give it to him,’ she said, with a sudden accession of strength in her voice ; ‘give it to him as a token from me. It is the last, and he may accept it now. You will see him some

day in England, where he will be living with his wife and children while I am lying deep buried under Egyptian soil ; but I think he will not have forgotten me quite. If he has, this will remind him. You will give it to him, Mademoiselle ? Oh, you will,—you will ?’

‘Yes, I will,’ said Margaret earnestly, for it was impossible to withstand the agonised longing of those pleading eyes.

For a moment the assurance seemed to give relief, but then Valda went on more urgently than before. ‘Tell him that it was not because I did not love him that I did not come. I loved him more than life itself, and I tried to come, but the decree of destiny was against me. Your eyes were upon me, and Djêmal’s little arms held me back, and the Pâsha,—ah, that deep, deep, terrible gulf!—it yawns between, and it is too wide to cross—I am falling, falling——’

Her eyes were dilated with terror, and her breath came in long, sighing gasps. Then suddenly Margaret saw a change more startling than all that had gone before, and she called wildly to the Pâsha, who was then entering the room : ‘Oh, Pâsha, come quickly,—Valda is going !’

He was at the bedside in an instant ; but already Valda had slipped deep into the dark valley, and her eyes rested upon him without recognition. ‘Valda, Valda !’ he cried, throwing his arms round her body in an agony. ‘Oh, my beloved, do not leave me !’

But she did not hear him, and her thoughts were not of him. ‘Tell him that I loved him, and

that I always shall love him,' she said indistinctly ; and then her difficult breath ceased, and with one long sigh her life went out.

Her last words had been a message for Fitzroy, and Margaret knew it. Did the Pâsha know it too? He stood motionless for a moment, looking at the white face that lay beautiful in the calm of death in the midst of its auriolate of golden hair, and then, with a sudden cry of exceeding bitterness, he sank down by the bedside, and buried his face in his arms. His sun had set, his star had gone down into darkness, and the deep waters of sorrow swept surging over the soul of the strong man. Margaret was pierced to the heart by the sight, and unable to bear it, she crept silently away.

## CHAPTER XXII

It was on the last day of Ramazân that Valda died, and she was buried early next morning, while the sounds of the rejoicing for Bâirâm filled all the city. The festival of the Lesser Bâirâm lasts for three days, during which it is the custom of the Turks to appear in their best clothes, to visit and entertain, and to make handsome presents to their friends and to the members of their households.

It is not the custom, even among the most Europeanised of the Turks, to mourn after the fashion of the West,—to put on black and withdraw from society,—but the great white palace on the banks of the Nile was none the less a house of mourning. There were no presents for the slaves that year, no festivities for the ladies, and the voice of wailing that went up instead of the songs of rejoicing was genuine enough. The last day of the festival was on Easter Sunday, and Margaret, debarred from going to church or holding any communication with her friends, but too wretched to show, or even feel, any resentment, looked drearily out of the palace windows into the sunny garden which seemed to mock her with its brightness.

It was the most sorrowful Easter Sunday she

had ever known, and it was almost a relief to her when, at the close of the afternoon, a message was brought to her from the Pâsha, saying that he wished to see her. She could guess what he had to say to her, and she stooped, with tears in her eyes, to kiss little Djemâl-ed-Din, who in all this sad time, during which he had almost given her his mother's place in his affections, had grown very close to her heart ; but anything was better than continued suspense and uncertainty, and she went to the saloon with a firm step.

The Pâsha was standing in the middle of the room before a marble and gilt table, on which lay a large purse, of the netted kind with silver rings that the Turks use, and he did not invite her to sit down. Margaret thought he was looking terribly worn and ill, and the desolate appearance of the room, with its empty flower-vases, and every little sign of Valda's work and presence carefully put away, struck her with such an overwhelming sense of sad realisation that she nearly burst into tears. But the Pâsha's voice, when he spoke to her, was restraining.

'I have sent for you, Mademoiselle,' he said, 'to tell you that your services in this house will be no longer needed. I have come to the conclusion that it is not desirable to have any foreign influence in my *harîm*. The risks involved are too great, and I shall prefer to have my little son brought up by the slaves under my supervision, until he is old enough to be sent to school. You will leave, therefore, as soon as it is convenient to you.'

It was the decision that Margaret had expected.

She had recognised that it was inevitable ; and indeed, now that Valda was gone, she did not see how it would have been possible for her to stay ; yet the sentence of dismissal, when it actually fell, seemed more than she could endure, and she stood speechless under the shock of it.

‘I think your salary was paid last month as usual,’ the Pâsha went on with the cold courtesy which hurt so much more cruelly than any show of anger could have done, ‘but you may have a difficulty in getting another position in this country, and you will probably have to return to England. I consider that you have not treated me well, and therefore you must not apply to me for a recommendation, but I do not wish you to come to any trouble, and I give you therefore a hundred pounds, which will pay for your passage home comfortably, and keep you supplied until you can settle yourself in another place.’

He pushed the bag towards her as he spoke, and Margaret was sensible of the generosity that was so characteristic of him ; but she made no movement to accept it. ‘Oh, Pâsha, this is more than I can endure !’ she said, with the tears running down her cheeks. ‘This is too much ! You may be right in sending me away,—I do not dispute that,—indeed, I do not see how I could stay now that Valda is gone. It is better that I should go,—but not in this way ! You, who have been so kind a friend, should not have turned against me like this. What have I done that you should feel towards me as if I were a traitor and an enemy ? I loved Valda dearly, only less dearly than you

did ; what motive could I have for scheming to work disaster in your life and hers ? All my influence with her was used on your behalf ; I kept on urging her to tell you, until at last she withdrew her confidence from me and turned to Hamîda Hânem instead. It was she who helped on the intrigue, not I. Indeed, indeed, I did not do it. All my fault has been in the error of judgment that made me obey Valda's command not to tell you.'

'It was a serious one,' said the Pâsha bitterly ; 'and it has cost me all that made life of any value to me. I trusted you so entirely, and you knew it so well ! I must have been assuring you of my faith and confidence in you at the very time that you had this secret on your mind. You knew all the time that this was going on, and you never said a word to put me on my guard. Even if you had no hand in the plotting of it,—and I can believe that Hamîda Hânem would be equal to that without your help,—yet you knew of it ; you could have stopped it at any moment by coming to me, and you did not do it. I cannot forgive you for that dereliction of duty, Mademoiselle. It is not your fault that I do not stand here a dishonoured as well as a heart-broken man.'

He did not know,—Margaret did not know,—that in this belief he was mistaken. Valda, who could have told him, was silent for ever in her narrow grave under the sun-stricken sand of the Turkish cemetery ; Fitzroy was many leagues away in the ship that was ploughing her way through the dividing seas—there was none to



declare the truth, and the silence that followed was broken only by the sobs that Margaret was unable to restrain.

The Pâsha looked at her in silence. In the face of such unmistakable emotion he did not find himself able to remain altogether unmoved, and even in the midst of his reproaches his voice had softened, and the cold hostility of manner, which he wore like a mask over his sorrow, had given way to a gentler mood. When he spoke again it was with something of his old kindliness. 'Take this money, Mademoiselle,' he said considerately, 'and let it help to start you afresh in your own country. You are young still, and the time will come when you will have forgotten the tragedy in which you have played a part here. It has darkened my life for ever, but I have no desire to be revenged upon you. As for that scoundrel who has fled to England, he is out of my reach now, but if ever you come across him you may tell him that punishment may overtake him yet. If he has any value for his life he had better not set foot in this country again, or in Constantinople, so long as I am alive. If ever he comes within reach of my hand his fate will be sealed.'

Margaret started. In her overwhelming trouble and grief she had forgotten the commission that had been entrusted to her by Valda in her dying moments, but now she was reminded of it, and she felt that she ought to let his Excellency know of it. Now at least she would be frank with him, and keep back no more secrets from him. 'I never wish to see him again,' she said

earnestly. 'He has injured me more than anybody has ever done before, and of my own will I would never go near him again; but only a few minutes before she died, Valda asked me to take a message and a memento of her to him. It was that diamond star,—the one I told you of, that was the beginning of the whole mischief; she wrapped it up in one of her *yâshmâks* and asked me to give it to him.'

'She asked that, she wished that!' said the Pâsha painfully. 'That then was what she had called you in for. She was thinking of him,—planning for him then,—her last thoughts were for him! Oh, my God, it is too bitter to bear!'

'I promised,' said Margaret hurriedly; 'but now she is gone, and I cannot offend her any more, I must ask your permission before I can carry out her desire. Do you wish me to do it, or shall I give it back to you?'

The Pâsha put out his hand with a hasty gesture of horror and repulsion, as if he expected her to produce the star at once. 'No!' he said vehemently; 'I never wish to see the accursed thing again. The wishes of the dead must be respected, and she has given it to you. Do what you like with it. Throw it into the sea, or sell it for what it will fetch, or give it to him,—I do not care. But if you do give it to him, may it bring on him and his the curse that it has been to me and mine. God make it a curse that will blacken his days for ever!'

Those were the Pasha's last words at that interview, and Margaret could never forget the

look on his face as he uttered them ; but that was not the last impression she was to carry away of him. On the morning that she was leaving he had to attend a levée, and he sent for her to bid her good-bye before he went out.

She came to him in her hat and veil, and as he looked at her his blue eyes lost their hostility, and his manner became as kind as in the old days. 'Adieu, Mademoiselle,' he said sadly ; 'I never thought to send you away like this, but after what has passed there is no help for it. I shall always wish you well.'

'If I could feel that you forgave me,—if you would only say that you believe me when I tell you that I never did you any intentional harm!'

Margaret said through the sobs which choked her.

He answered her with the melancholy of a deeply-seated bitterness. 'I can believe that you did not mean to bring upon me all the harm that has come. I trusted you ; you are an English-woman, and the English are known to be faithful. You did not keep faith with me, but perhaps it was not your fault. I believe you would have acted honourably to any one else. But we are doomed ; we are Turks, and we are not to have honourable treatment,—we are not to have justice. You have failed me : my happiness is in ruins and my life is made desolate ; but I do not blame you. It is the will of Providence, and what God pleases will be done. Adieu, Mademoiselle ; may peace attend you.'

He was a noble gentleman, Margaret had always felt, and he had the typical qualities of the finest

men of his race ; but she had never realised this so clearly as she did now when she looked at him for the last time. He stood before the recess of the window in his uniform, a soldier every inch of him, and as she heard him express his conviction of the doom which hung over him and his country, Margaret was filled with a sense of poignant pain. 'Adieu, Monsieur le Pâsha,' she said, and hurriedly withdrawing her hand from a clasp that was more sympathetic than his words, she passed out of his presence, and out of the palace.

Margaret never saw the Pâsha again, and she never thought to hear of him ; but the day came when she saw his name in an English newspaper. It was just a year later, when the war between the Turks and the Greeks in Thessaly was at its height, and Margaret, sitting at a comfortless tea-table in a dingy London lodging, was reading the stirring account of the storming of the Grecian heights, when her eye leaped to the name that she knew so well. He had fallen, pierced by many bullets, as he led his men in that gallant charge, and his death was recorded as one of the most heroic incidents of the campaign. It was a short paragraph, and the paper dropped from Margaret's hand as soon as she had read it. She sat white and stunned like one who has sustained some overwhelming shock, but from her pale lips the words escaped : 'It is the happiest ending for him ; it is what he must have wished and hoped for. Now he sees,—now he knows !'

## CHAPTER XXIII

‘REALLY, Henry, I think you are abominably inattentive. I asked you to come to help me to arrange my presents, and here you are, no good at all; and not only that,—you don’t seem to take the slightest interest in them!’

Henry Fitzroy was standing in the window of a small house in Mayfair, looking out into a world wrapped in the yellow pall of a dense November fog. It was early in the afternoon, but in the room behind him the gas was already burning, and by its light a well-dressed young woman was fussily engaged in the occupation of setting out wedding-presents on a number of little tables ranged round the walls.

Fitzroy had turned his back upon the bride-elect and the presents, and seemed absorbed in the contemplation of the gloomy street; but his thoughts were far away. In his imagination he saw a land of cloudless skies and perpetual sunshine—a land where the amethystine hills shut in a shining city with white-domed mosques and slender minarets that soared high into the blue. There, among the palm-trees that fringed the banks of the old, historic river, rose a splendid

palace with arabesque-covered walls, and carved lattice-windows, and marble flights of steps all steeped in sunshine ; and all round were quiet gardens full of colour and scent and bloom, where the thick shrubberies of orange and lemon and mandarine trees were laden with their golden fruit. It seemed like a scene out of the Arabian Nights to look back upon, but on Fitzroy's face, as he thought of it, there rested a dark shadow of disappointment and disillusion. He was remembering the last hours that he had spent there, those long hours of watching in the shadow of the minaret under the starry sky. He had waited and hoped until the pearly light of the dawn had begun to creep up behind the hills, and the gun from the Citadel had boomed the hour of sunrise, before he realised that his hope was in vain. The decisive moment had come and gone, and Valda had drifted past him,—he did not dream how far. It was no use waiting now ; there was nothing for it but to let the veil of silence and separation fall, and the wide seas roll between them.

He left Egypt with his heart so numbed by disappointment and despair that he felt as if it were dead within him, and he cared not what became of him ; but on board the steamer was a young lady of lively temperament and ambitious nature whom he had known in Cairo, a young lady whose hats had been a source of distraction in the church, and whose light, flirtatious chatter had amused him in the days before a chance encounter under the acacias of Ghesireh had changed all his life for him.

Miss Hilda Gibson was scarcely the sort of girl who would have attracted him seriously at any time, and she was certainly not the ideal that he had formed of the woman he meant to marry ; but he was thrown a good deal into her society on board ship, and in his depressed and disappointed state of mind he was not disposed to be critical. She happened to be the handsomest and smartest woman on board, and having failed in securing a husband during her season at Cairo, she was determined to make the most of her opportunities before she reached London, where they were likely to be more limited. She was decidedly second-rate, but she was clever and unscrupulous, and she managed so well, that by the time the ship reached Plymouth she had attained her object, and Fitzroy found that, without quite knowing how, he had drifted into a position which left no alternative but an engagement.

Eight months had gone by since then, and the engagement had long ago become a burden and an annoyance to him ; but he had never found strength or energy to break away from it, and now it was too late. This was the eve of his wedding-day. It struck him suddenly that the fact inspired him with strangely little exultation, but it was no use worrying over that ; it was not worth while—nothing was worth while. What was Hilda worrying about ?

‘ You have not been listening to a word of what I have been saying,’ she complained peevishly ; ‘ and you won’t take the least little bit of interest in my arrangements. Here I am slaving to show

these things off to the best advantage, and I can't make anything of them. I think I never saw such a shabby collection.'

'What is the matter with the presents?' Fitzroy inquired, lifting his eyebrows slightly.

'They are such a poor lot—at least they look poor. Whether it is this horrid light or what, I don't know, but I don't seem able to make them look decent anyhow. The only nice things among them are the ornaments, and those, of course, I shall want to wear.'

She sighed as she spoke, and taking up a small case of purple velvet, she opened it to look at the ornament nestling in the pale blue satin inside. It was a little gold brooch, a pretty little brooch, set with pearls; it was one of the bridegroom's gifts to her, but her face did not light up as she looked at it, and as he watched her, Fitzroy found himself wondering whether she cared for him at all. It occurred to him that if there was no love on either side it would be a poor look out for them both.

'You like that, don't you?' he asked tentatively.

'Ye—s—oh yes! I think it is awfully pretty, and I am very fond of pearls; but of course they don't shine out like diamonds. Gertrude Wilson had an exquisite diamond star that fastened her veil, and it was mentioned in the papers and admired by everybody. Oh, Henry, I wonder whether you will ever be able to afford to give me diamonds!'

'I don't think it is in the least likely,' Fitzroy replied drily. 'I am afraid, Hilda, that you are



committing yourself to a piece of folly in linking your fate to that of a man whose station is unadorned with diamonds. I suppose it is too late to draw back now ?’

‘Oh, dear me, yes !’ said the lady, quick to take alarm. It was all very well to feel that her matrimonial arrangements, compared with those of her fortunate friend, appeared to disadvantage. Gertrude Wilson’s triumph might have gone off with more *éclat*, but to get married at all was in these days an achievement, and Henry Fitzroy was an eligible and even distinguished bridegroom. She had for months been going about in society holding her head high and chanting the song of Mrs. Gaskell’s young lady, ‘Cockadoodle-doo, I’ve got a husband !’ and she was not at all inclined to imperil the safety of a substantial capture for the sake of the vain glittering of unattainable glories.

‘Dear me, Henry, how huffy you are !’ she said upbraidingly. ‘As if I would give you up for any diamonds ! Of course I didn’t mean *that* ! I was only just telling you what I should like some day if ever you become rich. I do so love diamonds !’

‘All women do, I believe,’ said Fitzroy cynically ; but as he said it, the thought of one woman who had shown herself very careless of hers flashed vividly into his mind. He remembered the splendid star that Valda had held out to him and begged him to accept. Compared to that the little pearl brooch Hilda was looking at was a modest ornament indeed. If Hilda could have known of the diamonds with which she might have been

crowned—but no ! Had he kept the star, Fitzroy said to himself with sudden passion, it should never have been worn by Hilda. Never could he have endured the sight of her wearing Valda's diamonds, and looking for the mention of them in the newspapers ; since she prized diamonds so highly, he was glad that he had not got it, and was therefore spared the difficulty he might have had in keeping it from her.

It seemed strange to him afterwards to remember that this thought was actually in his mind when a servant knocked at the door, and interrupted the lovers with the announcement that a lady asking to see Captain Fitzroy was waiting down-stairs.

'A lady—what name did she give ?' asked Fitzroy, and he was visibly discomposed when the maid gave the name of Miss Grey.

'Miss Grey ? Who's *she* ?' inquired Hilda, with a suspicious accent upon the pronoun.

'She is a person whom I came across in Cairo,' said Fitzroy, recovering himself with an effort. 'I had no idea that she was in England.'

'Dear me—in Cairo ! I don't remember her name at all ? What set was she in ?'

'Not in any set where you would be likely to meet her. Indeed, I don't suppose she was in any English set at all. She was a governess, or companion, or something of that kind, in a Turkish family out there, and it was in connection with a matter of business that I got to know her. It is probably that which brings her now—I don't know, I had better go and see.'

'Don't be long,' Hilda called out after him in

her shrill, high-pitched tones, as he left the room. 'Remember I have got all this beastly arranging to do, and I can't get on without your assistance.'

Fitzroy did not stop to make any reply to this exhortation. He was in a state of uncontrollable agitation, and he hurried down the stairs consumed with a strange anxiety and nameless longing.

Margaret had been shown into a small room on the ground floor, which was the only one not taken up with the preparations for the wedding, and she sat in the dim light of a yellow square of fog which represented the window. It struck Fitzroy that she looked older and thinner than when he had seen her last, and that there was a pinched look about her face and dress; but this was a mere fleeting impression, and he did not pause to reflect upon it.

'Miss Grey! This is a surprise,—I had no idea you were in England,' he said rapidly, and then he broke off abruptly, and looked at her with a flush upon his cheek and a mute interrogation in his eyes.

Margaret did not answer it at once. 'I have been in England for some months,' she said quietly; 'but I have had some difficulty in finding you, and it was only through an announcement in a newspaper which chanced to catch my eye that I have been able to do so now. You are going to be married, are you not?'

'Yes,' said Fitzroy with a frown. He did not feel able to meet her glance, and he made a hasty movement away from her, and averted his face as he pressed the button to turn on the electric light.

‘Yes, I am to be married to-morrow,’ he said doggedly.

‘Ah, well, I congratulate you,’ said Margaret, with a fine shade of irony in her calm tones. ‘And I may congratulate myself also, for I am just in time, and this memento that Valda Hânem charged me to take to you will seem to come in appropriately.’

She had been taking out of its wrappings of paper a parcel that she held in her hand, and as she spoke she handed to him the star loosely folded in the muslin, just as Valda had given it to her. Fitzroy knew before he took it what it was ; but what it meant he could not tell, and his emotion was so overpowering that he could not ask. ‘It will do as a wedding present for your bride,’ said Margaret, as the star fell out of its loose wrapping and glittered under the electric light in his shaking hand.

She saw the dull red grow deeper in his cheek, and as she looked at him she remembered the curse that the Pâsha had joined to the jewel. She was neither a superstitious nor a revengeful woman, but a thrill went through her as she recalled it, and she wondered if there was any blighting effect in these things.

‘Tell me,’ Fitzroy said, turning upon her at last almost fiercely ; ‘what does this mean ? Why has Valda sent me this ? Why are you in England ? Have you brought me a message from her ?’

‘Yes,’ said Margaret, ‘but,—you have not heard ?—you do not know ?’

‘What?’ asked Fitzroy, with a sudden fear clutching at his heart. ‘What has happened? Tell me quickly. Is Valda well?’

‘Yes, she is well,—I hope so. She will never suffer any more,’ said Margaret quietly; ‘she is dead.’

‘Valda is dead, and you have done it,’—this was the message that Margaret had intended to deliver; but when it came to the point she could not do it. She had disliked Fitzroy from the first, and now she had good reason for her aversion; yet when she saw his face as the truth came upon him, she felt that it was not for her to add to the poignancy of it by any words of crimination.

In truth, no accusation could have stabbed deeper than the silent conclusion of his own heart, and nothing that Margaret could have said or done could have made any appreciable difference in the agony of his remorse. He knew, without being told, that it was he who had done it, and it was this knowledge that crushed him. He sat motionless under the brilliant electric light, which showed the dark shadows in his face, and shone with a thousand reflected lights and sparkles in the facets of the diamonds on the table. Margaret turned her face away, and was silent for many minutes, looking out of the window into the gathering depths of the fog.

‘How did it happen?’ asked Fitzroy, breaking at last the silence that was growing too terrible to be borne. ‘Tell me everything.’

Margaret told him. She told it simply without any comment or reproach, but though the words

were dispassionate, it was a story of burning import in the ears of the listener who was responsible for it. 'She was struck down the night that your letter reached her, the night that you were waiting for her,' said Margaret quietly. 'Her love for you was like a fever in her veins, and it was burning her life out. You had kept it alight by the intercourse that you managed to secure through Hamîda ; but when Ramazân came, she thought it was all over, and she tried to starve out the evil by giving herself up to the exercises of her religion. She prayed and fasted until her worldly desires were almost stifled by bodily weakness.'

'That was your doing,' Fitzroy broke in passionately ; 'I am certain that you are responsible for that !'

'No,' said Margaret, 'I saw that she was not strong enough to bear it, and I joined with the Pâsha in trying to dissuade her, but our remonstrances were unavailing. She went on until she was worn to a shadow ; then your letter came, and the strain became too great. She went to bed that evening very ill, but in the middle of the night she got up, and wandered about, exposed to the cold air which came in through an open window. She must have been in a great agony of mind, for at last she sank under it and fell down unconscious. The Pâsha found her upon the floor in the morning, insensible, with your letter in her hand.' Margaret paused, but Fitzroy was listening with his hand over his eyes, and he said nothing. 'She lived for another week after that,' Margaret went on, 'but she was delirious nearly the whole time

until just before the end. Then she called me in, and told me where to find the star, and the veil that it was to be wrapped in, and she put them into my hand. She said that I was to give them to you as a token from her, and that I was to tell you that she loved you, and that if she had disappointed you it was not her fault. She had tried to come to you, but she had been held back by forces that were too strong for her, and now she had fallen into a great gulf. She had raved incessantly about that gulf all through her illness, and I suppose that her mind was not quite clear at the last ; but she said once more, " Tell him that I loved him and that I always shall love him," and that must have been her last thought.'

Margaret delivered this message in the conscientious, but monotonous manner of a person who repeats a lesson that has been learned by rote. She had felt it her duty to give it, but it was a painful and distasteful duty, and she was thankful when it was done.

' I think that is all I had to tell you,' she said, after a pause that was not broken by any sound from Fitzroy,—' all except a message from the Pâsha. When Valda was dead, and he had dismissed me from my post in his house, I felt that I had no right to take away, without his knowledge, so valuable a thing as that star, and I told him of Valda's dying request. He said that, so far as he was concerned, it should be respected, and that I might give you the star if I liked ; but he sent a heavy curse with it, and he told me that if ever you came within reach of his hand he would not

fail to take vengeance upon you. From what he said I fancy that it would be advisable for you to keep away during his lifetime from any part of the Turkish dominions. That is all I was to tell you, I think, and now I will go. Good-bye.'

Margaret rose from her chair, and stood for a moment, looking at Fitzroy. He had sunk forward, with his arms resting on the table and his face buried in them, and he did not move. It was doubtful whether he heard Margaret's last words ; at any rate he did not look up, and it was not until the closing of the hall-door fell upon his ear that he awoke to the consciousness that she was gone. He raised his head then, and as he looked at her empty chair, the impression that he had received when his eyes had first rested on her came suddenly back to him. She looked thin and ill, and her eyes had the strained expression that is too common in the anxious struggle among women in her position. There, on the table, lay the star that she had brought him, a jewel whose value was scarcely to be computed, and she was stranded in London without friends—perhaps without means. She had been dismissed from her situation on his account, no doubt, and he had suffered her to go away like this. He had not asked her address, and he had no clue by which he could find her out again. The realisation of all this flashed across his mind in an instant, and springing from his chair, he rushed to the front door and ran down the steps into the street. It was a long street, and Margaret could not possibly have gone more than a few steps along it ; but he could not see her. The yellow



fog filled the road on either side like an impenetrable veil, and he could not tell which way she had gone. He looked up and down in vain ; Margaret had vanished like a ghost into the gloom.

Fitzroy stood bare-headed in the middle of the murky street, feeling like a man in some horrible nightmare. He was trying to persuade himself that it was all a dream and a delusion, when he heard a shrill voice calling to him from the house, which brought him effectually to a sense of the reality of the situation. 'Henry, Henry! What on earth are you doing out there in the street? And where has this mag-nif-icent ornament come from that I have found on the study-table? Come in this moment and tell me all about it!'

This story ends, as stories should, with the music of marriage-bells ; let them revert to their time-honoured custom of ringing the curtain down. Captain Fitzroy and Miss Gibson were married the next morning, and no one knew what was in the heart of the bride as she smiled under a veil that was fastened by a pretty little pearl brooch.

The wonderful Turkish star, with its flashing diamonds, was not seen at the wedding ; nothing was seen at the wedding that was not perfectly common-place and conventional. And all that happened afterwards was also common-place,—not conventional, perhaps, but entirely common-place.

THE END

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